

Scientist finds nerve cells can reconnect

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An Australian scientist has found that nerve cells in elderly people can form new connections, offering hope to victims of strokes and spinal cord injuries.

PhD student Robert Sullivan, 28, of Newcastle University, made the discovery while researching the anatomy of macular degeneration in the eyes of elderly people.

When Sullivan studied the eyes of human donors in their late seventies and early eighties with macular degeneration, he found evidence the nerve cells in the retina were able to respond to the disease by forming new connections with neurons linking the eyes to the brain.

"It's extremely exciting because it's saying adult nerve cells have the capacity to reconnect," Sullivan's supervisor David Pow said.

"This is going to provide us with insights into how we might now enhance this capacity to try to provide therapy downstream for injured brains."

Pow said the discovery could lead to effective treatment for damaged human nervous systems after strokes and spinal cord injuries.

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