Egg-like cells obtained in pig fetal skin

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Canadian scientists at the University of Guelph say they've found stem cells isolated from the skin of pig fetuses can produce egg-like cells.

Embryologists have long sought to understand when and where germ cells -- which give rise to sperm and eggs -- are formed. The stem cells in the early embryo give rise to all the different lineages of the fetus, including the germ-cell lineage. In mammals, germ cells become segregated from non-germ cells (called somatic cells) during embryonic development and migrate to the gonads, where they form sperm or eggs.

But in the recent research, Julang Li and colleagues have shown even post-embryonic somatic stem cells can also give rise to egg-like cells in vitro.

Although it remains unclear whether such eggs can be fertilized to form viable embryos, Li said the ability to generate egg-like cells from cells derived from the skin provides new possibilities for tissue therapy and reproductive engineering.

The study is published in the April issue of Nature Cell Biology.