

Obesity: Perhaps not all hot fudge sundaes

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University of Pittsburgh scientists say it may not be all hot fudge sundaes and french fries that cause obesity -- it might also be due to brain chemistry.

The researchers say they've found the problem is due, at least in part, to an attraction between leptin, the hormone that signals the brain when to stop eating, and a protein more recently associated with heart disease.

They say recent evidence suggests C-reactive protein not only binds to leptin, but impairs leptin's role in controlling appetite. And that, they say, might help explain why obese people have so much trouble losing weight.

"There's been a lot of interest in leptin as a means to curb appetite and reduce weight but clinical trials have had disappointing results. Our studies suggest an approach that should be further studied is one that disrupts the interaction between leptin and (C-reactive protein), thereby restoring leptin's ability for signaling. We need to better understand how this interaction works and investigate the underlying mechanisms involved," said Allan Zhao, an assistant professor of cell biology and physiology, and the study's senior author.

The study appears in the journal *Nature Medicine*.

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