Gene treats diabetes but hurts liver

HOUSTON, Aug. 11 (UPI) -- U.S. researchers say they've found a gene that can either cure fatty liver disease and increase diabetes or treat diabetes and aggravate fatty liver disease.

The study by Texas A&M Health Science Center Institute of Biosciences and Technology at Houston, published online in the journal Diabetes, said a general drug that inhibits the FGFR4 gene will cure fatty liver disease in the obese while at the same time aggravating cholesterol, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

"A drug enhancing this gene’s activity will prevent waistline fat, heart disease and diabetes but aggravate liver disease if you overeat and are obese," lead author Wallace McKeehan, director in the Center for Cancer and Stem Cell Biology, said Friday in a release.

Fatty liver is a little-known consequence of obesity that is most common in alcoholics. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease in obese individuals is similar to the alcoholic version, resulting in hepatitis, cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer.

Obesity from overeating high-fat foods constantly stimulates liver FGFR4, overloading the organ’s ability to keep fat for only transient storage, the report said.

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