

Fruit fly hearts similar to human hearts

U.S. scientists say *Drosophila* fruit fly research may lead to new treatments for heart disease, the leading cause of death in industrialized nations.

Coordinated research at the Burnham Institute for Medical Research in La Jolla, Calif.; the University of California-San Diego and the University of Michigan found mutations in a molecular channel in fruit fly heart muscle cell membranes caused arrhythmias similar to those occurring in humans. That, said the researchers, suggests understanding how the channel's activity is controlled in the cell could lead to new heart disease treatments.

"This study shows the *Drosophila* heart can be a model for the human heart," said Burnham researcher Professor Rolf Bodmer. "Fly hearts have many ion channels that also are present in human hearts, making it suitable to extend mechanistic insight found in the fly hearts to human heart function."

The findings are to be published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and are now available on the journal's Web site.

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