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Activating the Brain's Self-Repair Mode

An interview with **Cindi Morshead**, Neuroscientist
University of Toronto

My research is really focussed on the identification and characterization of neural stem cells. So we're really interested in using these cells, that are found in the brain, for brain repair.

Stem cells are really the building blocks for development for all the tissues in your organs. What we've found out is that even in an adult, even after development has ceased, we still have some of these stem cells available. What's special about them is that they can make all the different cell types, depending on the tissue that they're in. So if they're in the brain, the stem cells can make brain cells; if they're in the liver, the liver stem cells can make liver cells.

There's a whole bunch of different pockets of these stem cells in the body, and the idea is we can activate them so that we can induce them to repair an injured tissue. We don't want to just change what's going on in the disease, we want to actually repair the body, and use our own body to do that.

What is your lab focusing on right now?

We're really trying to figure out how to activate the cells. There's a number of different ways that people have approached it, and we've had some really great success. We've used some repurposed drugs, things that are normally found in the clinical setting that are used to treat other diseases, like type II diabetes. And we've been able to show that if you stimulate resident brain stem cells with drugs that are already in the clinical setting, we can get the brain to repair itself after a neonatal injury, or in a young brain.

TODAY'S RESEARCH. TOMORROW'S REALITY.

