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Media release

Australian Banana industry looks further into female HIV link

A study published in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* concluding that banana lectin, a naturally occurring protein, has the ability to stop the transmission of HIV in women is being examined by the Australian Banana industry to determine its health potential.

Accredited Practising Dietitian and consultant to the Australian Banana industry, Glenn Cardwell says, "The health attributes of bananas are well-documented but until now there has been little focus on banana lectins."

Lectins are sugar-binding proteins found in plants that can identify and attach to foreign invaders, such as the sugar-rich HIV protein coat, subsequently blocking HIV's entry into the body.

David Marvovitz, M.D., Professor of Internal Medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School who led the study showed that a lectin called 'BanLec' is as potent as two HIV drugs, T-20 and maraviroc, that are currently being used to treat HIV.

Study author and doctoral student in the graduate program in immunology at the university, Michael E. Swanson said, "The problem with some HIV drugs is that the virus can mutate and become resistant, but that's much harder to do in the presence of lectins."

Cardwell says, "These findings appear very significant and could well lead to other examinations taking place to determine if BanLec can impact on other viruses and diseases.

"Five years ago it was reported in the *International Journal of Cancer* that women eating five bananas a week halved their risk of kidney cancer. It may well have been the natural lectins that helped confer that protection too.

"It is important to note that this is a study on the banana extract. At this point it is not known what the research means for female HIV sufferers, which is why we need to examine it further.

"However, it is good to see research on Australia's favourite fruit showing potential benefits beyond its abundant health and nutritional attributes," Cardwell says.

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