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Featured press release entry:

Genetics: Chromosome 16 tips the scales (AOP)

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Duplications of a short region on chromosome 16 are associated with an increased risk of being underweight, according to a report inNature this week. Deletion of this same section has previously been associated with obesity, indicating a possible opposing causal link between being underweight and being obese.
       Extremes at either end of the weight scale pose important health risks. Although a number of genetic variants have been associated with obesity, little is known about the genetic basis of being underweight. Jacques Beckmann and colleagues show that carriers of duplications of the locus 16p11.2 have notably lower postnatal weight and BMI compared with a reference population. Each of the observed associated characteristics is opposite of those reported in carriers of deletions at this locus. Moreover, these traits correlate with changes in transcript levels for genes within the duplication but not within the adjacent regions.
       The authors conclude that severe obesity and being underweight could have mirror aetiologies, possibly through contrasting effects on energy balance.