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# Expert follows his gut

## Breakthrough to help treat killer disease

**Health | Sally Spalding**

A MIDDLE Park scientist is "one step closer" to finding a cure for HIV.

Gregor Lichtfuss's new research at the Burnet Institute in Prahran may be able to extend the life of HIV patients.

Despite successful therapy through early intervention, HIV patients still have only a 50 per cent chance of reaching the age of 70.

Mr Lichtfuss is completing his PhD at the Burnet Institute, researching components of blood cells in patients with HIV and how they affect the gut's lining.

Working with two patient groups – those under treatment displaying symptoms and those who are "healthy" – Mr Lichtfuss has been analysing their blood cells to determine how the immune system in patients might be boosted.

Mr Lichtfuss, from Munich, has always worked in the immunology area.

"This AIDS virus is an intriguing disease," he said.

"I have been working on it for two ½ years and feel I am no closer to knowing anything about it.

"But what I have learned is we are one step closer to a cure through this research."

Mr Lichtfuss's research involves the "Natural Killer" cells in the blood which have the power to destroy HIV-infected cells.

But for most HIV patients they are too few and do not work.

"If we can discover how to make these cells stronger to restore the immune system to its full strength then we are one step closer to finding a cure," he said.

Mr Lichtfuss is the Victorian winner of the AusBiotech GSK Student Excellence Awards and will compete for the National title later this month.

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Gregor Lichtfuss is involved in research that may extend the lives of HIV patients.

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