

Reporting Summary

Nature Research wishes to improve the reproducibility of the work that we publish. This form provides structure for consistency and transparency in reporting. For further information on Nature Research policies, see our [Editorial Policies](#) and the [Editorial Policy Checklist](#).

Statistics

For all statistical analyses, confirm that the following items are present in the figure legend, table legend, main text, or Methods section.

n/a Confirmed

- The exact sample size (n) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement
- A statement on whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
- The statistical test(s) used AND whether they are one- or two-sided
Only common tests should be described solely by name; describe more complex techniques in the Methods section.
- A description of all covariates tested
- A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as tests of normality and adjustment for multiple comparisons
- A full description of the statistical parameters including central tendency (e.g. means) or other basic estimates (e.g. regression coefficient) AND variation (e.g. standard deviation) or associated estimates of uncertainty (e.g. confidence intervals)
- For null hypothesis testing, the test statistic (e.g. F , t , r) with confidence intervals, effect sizes, degrees of freedom and P value noted
Give P values as exact values whenever suitable.
- For Bayesian analysis, information on the choice of priors and Markov chain Monte Carlo settings
- For hierarchical and complex designs, identification of the appropriate level for tests and full reporting of outcomes
- Estimates of effect sizes (e.g. Cohen's d , Pearson's r), indicating how they were calculated

Our web collection on [statistics for biologists](#) contains articles on many of the points above.

Software and code

Policy information about [availability of computer code](#)

Data collection

NMR data collection: Topspin 4
Xray data collection: PXII beamline software at the Swiss Light Source

Data analysis

NMR data processing: Topspin 4 and NMRPipe/ NMRDraw version 9.6
NMR data analysis: NMRFAM-SPARKY 1.2 powered by Sparky 3.115, CARA 1.9.1.8a2 and NMRViewJ 9.2.0-b24
NMR structure calculations: Cyana 3.98.13
X-ray structure calculations: XDS 2021, CCP4 7.1, Phaser 2.8.3, Coot 0.9.6 and Phenix 1.18.2-3874
Data fitting: Matlab R2021a
Visualization: ChimeraX 1.1
Sequence analysis: ClustalX 2.1

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors and reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Research [guidelines for submitting code & software](#) for further information.

Data

Policy information about [availability of data](#)

All manuscripts must include a [data availability statement](#). This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A list of figures that have associated raw data
- A description of any restrictions on data availability

The structure factors and coordinates for the Xrn2 core protein have been deposited in the Protein Data Bank under accession code 7OPK. The assignments for the Xrn2 zinc finger have been deposited in the Biological Magnetic Resonance Bank under accession number 50997. The atomic coordinates for the Xrn2 zinc finger have been deposited in the Protein Data Bank under accession code 7PVM. All other relevant data are available in the source data provided with this manuscript and are also available upon request to the corresponding author.

Field-specific reporting

Please select the one below that is the best fit for your research. If you are not sure, read the appropriate sections before making your selection.

- Life sciences Behavioural & social sciences Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences

For a reference copy of the document with all sections, see nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf

Life sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Sample size	The exact sample size and the number of replicate experiments have been described in the figure legends and methods.
Data exclusions	No data (points) have been omitted.
Replication	All data were recorded as at least fully independent duplicates. All attempts at replication were successful.
Randomization	Randomization has no relevance in this study.
Blinding	Blinding has no relevance in this study.

Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

Materials & experimental systems

- | n/a | Involved in the study |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Antibodies |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Eukaryotic cell lines |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Palaeontology and archaeology |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Animals and other organisms |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Human research participants |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical data |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Dual use research of concern |

Methods

- | n/a | Involved in the study |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> ChIP-seq |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Flow cytometry |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> MRI-based neuroimaging |