One tiny DNA mutation may have paved path for humans to evolve big brains

Humans may in part owe their big brains to a DNA "typo" in their genetic code, research suggests.

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[In 2015], scientists pinpointed a human gene that they think was behind the expansion of a key brain region known as the neocortex. They believe the gene arose about five or six million years ago, after the human line had split off from chimpanzees.

Now, researchers have found a tiny DNA change...that appears to have changed the function of the gene, sparking the process of expansion of the neocortex.

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"A point mutation in a human-specific gene gave it a function that allows expansion of the relevant stem cells that make a brain big," [stated Dr. Wieland Huttner of the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden, Germany]. "This one, as it is fixed in the human genome – so all living humans have the gene – apparently gave a tremendous selection advantage, and that's why we believe it spread in the human population."

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: DNA clue to how humans evolved big brains