44 genetic variants linked to depression — and we may all carry some of them

Depression is a tricky beast. Symptoms vary widely from person to person, as does the response to treatment. But there's no question that genetic makeup plays an important role, and understanding the genetic architecture of depression could help us better understand how to treat it.

A new study in the journal Nature Genetics has identified 44 genetic variants that can increase the risk of developing major depression. The authors of the study, which examined the genes of nearly 500,000 people, say their work suggests that all humans may carry at least some of these variants. The largest study of its kind, the work refines our understanding of the complex ways that genetics impacts mental illness.

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To identify them, more than 200 scientists working with the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium conducted what's known as a genome-wide association study, scanning the genomes of 135,458 people with depression and 344,000 people without depression to identify variants associated with major depression. The variants were linked to the regions of the brain targeted by some antidepressant drugs.

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The study is an early step to more fully understanding the disorder, but identifying the molecular underpinnings could explain why some patients respond to treatment while others don't, as well as point the way to new therapies.

Read full, original post: Largest Study of Its Kind Identifies 44 Genetic Risk Factors for Depression