

Race and genetics: Gene found exclusively in people of African descent predisposes some Blacks to Alzheimer's

A gene variant found almost exclusively among people of African descent appears to substantially raise the risk of Alzheimer's disease, a new study finds.

The variant is in a gene called ApoE3, and it's apparently only harmful when it exists in combination with the ApoE4 gene — a well-known risk factor for Alzheimer's.

That gene duo was present in only 1% of the nearly 32,000 individuals in the study, all of African descent. But it was tied to a nearly threefold increase in the risk of developing Alzheimer's, according to findings published Feb. 21 in the [*Journal of the American Medical Association*](#).

[Dr. Michael Greicius](#), the senior researcher on the study, pointed to one major reason the finding is important: Most of what's known about the genetics of Alzheimer's — and diseases in general — comes from studies of white people.

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Meanwhile, some people do undergo genetic testing to see which ApoE forms they carry — often those with a strong family history of Alzheimer's.

And it's important, Greicius said, that doctors and genetic counselors understand that the influence of those genes can vary according to ancestry.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the full article here**](#)