Exposed but never caught COVID? Lucky genes may protect you

If you’ve made it this far without ever getting sick from Covid, you may have your genes to thank.

A study published [July 19] in the journal Nature found that people who have a specific genetic variation of a protein in the body may be more likely to never develop Covid symptoms — even if they are infected with the virus.

The protein in question is called human leukocyte antigen, or HLA. It’s found on the surface of cells and helps flag down the body’s immune system if something goes wrong — say, its cell becomes infected with the coronavirus.

But the proteins aren’t identical to those of siblings, family members or friends, thanks to tiny differences on the genetic level that make each person’s HLA proteins unique.

The study found that 20% of people who never developed Covid symptoms had at least one copy of a variant called HLA-B*15:01, compared to just 9% of those who had symptoms. People who carried two copies of this variant were more than eight times more likely than those who didn’t to test positive for Covid but remain asymptomatic.

But HLA proteins are just one piece of the puzzle, the researchers found.

This is an excerpt. Read the full article here