

Mutant gene may have affected Abe Lincoln

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U.S. scientists say they might have discovered the origin of a disease identified in 11 generations of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln's family.

The University of Utah study focused on a protein that keeps nerve cells flexible. For example, if you bend a knee, the nerves stretch but don't break. But the study found that when the gene producing that protein was disabled in worms, their nerve cells broke.

The discovery may provide an explanation for spinocerebellar ataxia type 5 -- a disease previously tied to a human version of the gene and identified in 11 generations of Lincoln's family, starting with his paternal grandparents. The disease might also have afflicted Lincoln.

"Were Lincoln's nerves shattered? We don't know. But our study raises the possibility that they were," said biology Professor Michael Bastiani, the study's senior author.

The research is detailed in the Jan. 29 issue of *The Journal of Cell Biology*.

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