Scientists Identify Gene That May Cause a Form of Baldness

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Researchers believe they've found the gene responsible for alopecia areata (AA), an autoimmune disease that causes a type of baldness, according to a study by Columbia University Medical Center in New York City and reported on CNN Health.

For the study, scientists combed through more than 1,000 samples from the National Alopecia Areata Registry, a patient registry funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Researchers discovered eight genes connected with alopecia areata and isolated one among them that possibly helped trigger the disorder. The findings also showed that people having 16 or more of these genes progressed from small bald spots to total baldness.

Unlike previous theories linking the disorder to inflammatory diseases such as psoriasis, these findings show AA is more genetically related to diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and type 1 diabetes.

"It gives us hope that some day there may be a cure for this condition," said Angela Christiano, MD, lead author of the study. "It gives pharmaceutical companies a target to go forward and start developing new drugs."

In addition, Christiano and crew are working on a new genetic test to determine AA's severity.

Alopecia areata affects more than 3.5 million people and is the most common human autoimmune disease. It is also the second leading cause of hair loss after male pattern baldness.

Currently, there is no cure and no effective treatment other than painful steroid injections.

Learn about other reasons why people suffer hair loss here.