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## Brain Protein Identified As Likely Factor In Parkinson's

Ananova

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A protein that exists normally in most of the cells in the brain has been identified as a possible factor in the development of Parkinson's disease.

The discovery could point the way to treatments.

In lab experiments, when the brain protein alpha-synuclein combines with dopamine in nerve cells it can trigger the production of toxic reactive oxygen molecules that kill the nerves, according to a research team led by Dr Bruce Yankner of Harvard Medical School.

If this process operates in patients the same way it does in the laboratory, it could set scientists on the path to potential treatments, Dr Yankner said.

But it also adds to the debate over whether the current use of dopamine in the treatment of Parkinson's could make things worse in the long run, he added.

The findings appear in the journal Nature Medicine.

More than a million Americans are victims of Parkinson's, which causes muscle stiffness and tremor as neurons in the brain are damaged.

The disease has received widespread attention due to several prominent patients, including former boxing champion Muhammad Ali and actor Michael Fox. The Pope is also believed to be suffering from the disease.

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