

# Study: Abraham Lincoln may have had ataxia

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University of Minnesota scientists say they've found evidence President Abraham Lincoln may have been a victim of a neurological disease called ataxia.

The National Ataxia Foundation describes the condition as an "inability to coordinate muscular movements that is symptomatic of some nervous disorders."

The researchers have uncovered a genetic secret that has plagued the Lincoln family for at least 11 generations: a mutation that causes a form of ataxia, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported Monday.

The discovery -- published online by the journal Nature Genetics -- doesn't prove the 16th president suffered from ataxia, said Professor Laura Ranum, a geneticist who led the research. But Ranum and her colleagues studied 300 distant cousins of the president and found about a third of them have ataxia.

Then, last year, they found a genetic mutation on the 11th chromosome that makes a defective protein. Ranum said any family member with the gene will get ataxia "if they live long enough."

She told the Star Tribune if Abe Lincoln's aunt and uncle both had the ataxia gene, then one of Lincoln's grandparents must have also had it. That means he could have inherited it as well, she added, possibly explaining what was then described as Lincoln's unusually clumsy gate -- one of the traits associated with ataxia.

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