

Study: Brain cells have death system

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Harvard Medical School scientists in Boston announced Wednesday they have identified a protein that directly regulates cell death in the brain.

They say their finding raises the possibility a reduction in the expression of that protein in vulnerable neurons may protect them from undergoing cell death in many neurological disorders, including stroke and neurodegenerative diseases.

"An understanding of neural-specific mechanisms of cell death is likely to be invaluable in the development of potential therapies for a variety of devastating neurological diseases," said Dr. Azad Bonni, a professor of pathology and the study's co-author.

Programmed cell death, or apoptosis, culls unneeded cells during development and growth and so protects an organism by triggering suicide in defective cells. Later in life, cells too quick to self-destruct may contribute to neurodegenerative diseases and immunodeficiency disorders.

The research is detailed in the March 2 issue of the journal *Neuron*.

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