

# Genetic discovery raises the prospect of MS screening

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MULTIPLE sclerosis can be caused by a single genetic mutation, leading to hopes that screening could help prevent thousands of cases.

Around 100,000 people in Britain suffer from MS, an autoimmune disease that causes the body to attack the protective coating on nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, stopping them communicating properly and leading to inflammation and even early death.

Although it was unknown what causes the condition, scientists at the University of British Columbia found that two thirds of people with a muta-

tion to the NRIH3 gene will develop the condition.

Recent research has shown that Vitamin D can help prevent the debilitating illness, so screening for the mutation could show who should increase their intake of the sunshine vitamin.

Those people with the mutation also have a more aggressive form of the disease so catching them early is crucial.

Researchers say the discovery erases any doubts that at least some forms of MS are inherited. The findings, published in the journal *Neuron*, could also help in the search for therapies that act upon the gene itself or counteract the mutation's disease-causing effects.