

1 Recessive variants in mitochondrial Complex I nuclear 2 subunits are an underrated cause of optic atrophy

3 Claudio Fiorini,^{1,†} Neringa Jurkute,^{2,3,4,†} Alessandra Torraco,^{5,†} Chiara La Morgia,^{1,6} Daniele
4 Ghezzi,^{7,8} Gaia Tioli,⁹ Laura Rigobello,⁹ Danara Ormanbekova,¹ Alessandro Berghella,⁶ Alberto
5 Pietro Pasti,¹ Flavia Palombo,¹ Piero Barboni,¹⁰ Maria Lucia Cascavilla,¹⁰ Federico Sadun,¹¹
6 Annamaria De Negri,¹² Enrico Bertini,¹³ Olimpia Musumeci,¹⁴ Anna Ardisson,¹⁵ Teresa Rizza,⁵
7 Giancarlo Iarossi,¹⁶ Gabriella Silvestri,^{17,18} Salvatore Rossi,¹⁷ Anastasia Altobelli,⁵ Antony T.
8 Moore,^{2,3} Thomas Cullup,¹⁹ Andrew R. Webster,^{2,3} Indran Davagnanam,²⁰ Michel
9 Michaelides,^{2,3} Samantha Malka,² Hana Ptackova,²¹ Hana Stufkova,²¹ Marketa Tesarova,²¹ Petra
10 Liskova,²² Leopold Zeng,²³ Thomas Klopstock,^{23,24,25} Robert Kopajtich,^{26,27} Christiane
11 Neuhofer,^{26,27,28} Holger Prokisch,^{26,27,29} Costanza Lamperti,⁷ Alfredo A. Sadun,^{30,31} Patrick Yu-
12 Wai-Man,^{2,3,32,33} Valerio Carelli,^{1,6} Francesco Musiani,⁹ Luisa Iommarini,^{9,‡} Rosalba Carrozzo,^{5,‡}
13 Gavin Arno^{2,3,34,‡} and Leonardo Caporali^{1,‡}

14 †,‡These authors contributed equally to this work.

15 Abstract

16 Our understanding of the genetic landscape of inherited optic neuropathies has grown significantly
17 over the past decades, and it is now known to involve many genes found in both the nuclear and
18 mitochondrial genomes, exhibiting all possible inheritance patterns. Furthermore, pathogenic
19 variants in nuclear genes of mitochondrial respiratory Complex I (CI) subunits have been identified
20 in some cases of ION, in addition to the more common severe presentation of CI deficiencies,
21 usually with early onset.

22 We conducted NGS screening of CI genes to identify potential causative variants in patients with
23 optic atrophy, also performing comprehensive clinical assessments, including neuroimaging
24 studies (MRI) and neurological evaluations. Detailed molecular structure modeling was performed

1 to better evaluate the damaging effects of both novel and previously reported variants in the
2 relevant CI subunits.

3 We identified and characterized candidate causative variants in 31 patients from 23 unrelated
4 families, with biallelic or hemizygous variants in 11 different nuclear CI-related genes encoding
5 polypeptides involved in the structure of CI, including 3 core subunits (*NDUFS7*, *NDUFV1*,
6 *NDUFV2*), 4 accessory subunits (*NDUFA1*, *NDUFA10*, *NDUFA12*, *NDUFB11*), and 4 assembly
7 factors (*NDUFAF2*, *NDUFAF3*, *NDUFAF4*, *NDUFAF8*). Notably, defects in core CI subunits in
8 this cohort lead to isolated optic atrophy, while defects in accessory CI subunits and assembly
9 factors resulted in a spectrum of phenotypes, from isolated to syndromic optic atrophy. For 12
10 cases, the subacute onset of vision loss enabled us to associate or confirm novel genes (*NDUFS7*,
11 *NDUFV1*, *NDUFAF2*, *NDUFAF4*, *NDUFAF8*) with the autosomal recessive Leber Hereditary
12 Optic Neuropathy (arLHON) phenotype. Moreover, in the *NDUFS7* subunit a partial spatial
13 segregation was noted for missense variants causing either Leigh syndrome or isolated optic
14 atrophy, hinting at possible disease-specific molecular defects.

15 Our case series broadens the genetic spectrum of inherited optic neuropathies, emphasizing the
16 crucial role of nuclear CI genes in its pathogenesis. The arLHON phenotype emerges as linked to
17 numerous nuclear CI genes for which an insidious onset of optic atrophy is also reported, and in
18 some cases the same variant may underlie both phenotypes. Overall, we highlight the possibly so
19 far underestimated prevalence of CI nuclear subunits in the molecular diagnosis of ION, prompting
20 to include all CI-related genes in the standard diagnostic screening.

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22 **Author affiliations:**

23 1 IRCCS Istituto delle Scienze Neurologiche di Bologna, Programma di Neurogenetica, 40139
24 Bologna, Italy

25 2 Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, London EC1V 2PD, UK

26 3 Institute of Ophthalmology, University College London, London EC1V 9EL, UK

27 4 The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, Queen Square, University College
28 London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London WC1N 3BG, UK

- 1 5 Laboratory of Medical Genetics, Translational Cytogenomics Research Unit, Bambino Gesù
2 Children's Hospital IRCCS, 00146 Rome, Italy
- 3 6 Department of Biomedical and Neuromotor Sciences (DIBINEM), University of Bologna,
4 40139 Bologna, Italy
- 5 7 Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta, Unit of Medical Genetics and
6 Neurogenetics, 20126 Milan, Italy
- 7 8 Department of Pathophysiology and Transplantation, University of Milan, 20126 Milan, Italy
- 8 9 Department of Pharmacy and Biotechnology (FABIT), University of Bologna, 40126 Bologna,
9 Italy
- 10 10 IRCCS Ospedale San Raffaele, 20132 Milan, Italy
- 11 11 Ospedale Oftalmico Roma, 00136 Rome, Italy
- 12 12 Azienda Ospedaliera San Camillo-Forlanini, 00152 Rome, Italy
- 13 13 Research Unit of Neuromuscular and Neurodegenerative Disorders, Bambino Gesù Children's
14 Hospital IRCCS, 00146 Rome, Italy
- 15 14 Department of Experimental and Clinical Medicine, University of Messina, 98122 Messina,
16 Italy
- 17 15 Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta, Child Neurology Unit, 20133 Milan,
18 Italy
- 19 16 Ophthalmology Unit, Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital IRCCS, 00165 Rome, Italy
- 20 17 Department of Neuroscience, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore-Sede di Roma, 00168
21 Rome, Italy
- 22 18 Neurology Unit, Fondazione Policlinico Universitario Agostino Gemelli IRCCS, Largo A
23 Gemelli, 00168 Rome, Italy
- 24 19 North Thames Genomic Laboratory Hub, Great Ormond Street Hospital, Guilford St, London
25 WC1N 3BH, UK
- 26 20 Department of Brain Repair and Rehabilitation, University College London Institute of
27 Neurology, Faculty of Brain Sciences, UCL, London WC1N 3AR, UK

- 1 21 Department of Paediatrics and Inherited Metabolic Disorders, First Faculty of Medicine,
2 Charles University and General University Hospital in Prague, 121 08 Prague, Czech Republic
- 3 22 Department of Ophthalmology, First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University and General
4 University Hospital in Prague, 121 08 Prague, Czech Republic
- 5 23 Friedrich-Baur-Institute, Department of Neurology, University Hospital, Ludwig-Maximilians
6 University, 81377 Munich, Germany
- 7 24 German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases, 81377 Munich, Germany
- 8 25 Munich Cluster for Systems Neurology (SyNergy), 81377 Munich, Germany
- 9 26 Institute of Human Genetics, Computational Health Center, Helmholtz Zentrum München,
10 85764 Neuherberg, Germany
- 11 27 Institute of Human Genetics, School of Medicine, Technical University of Munich, 81675
12 Munich, Germany
- 13 28 Department of Clinical Human Genetics, University Medical Center Regensburg, 93053
14 Regensburg, Germany
- 15 29 German Center for Child and Adolescent Health (DZKJ), partner site Munich, 80636 Munich,
16 Germany
- 17 30 Doheny Eye Institute, Pasadena, CA 91103, USA
- 18 31 Department of Ophthalmology, David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA
19 90095, USA
- 20 32 John van Geest Centre for Brain Repair and MRC Mitochondrial Biology Unit, Department
21 of Clinical Neurosciences, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 0XY, UK
- 22 33 Cambridge Eye Unit, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS
23 Foundation Trust, Cambridge CB2 0QQ, UK
- 24 34 Greenwood Genetic Center, Greenwood, South Carolina 29646, USA
- 25
- 26 Correspondence to: Leonardo Caporali
- 27 Ospedale Bellaria, Via Altura 3, 40139 Bologna, Italy

1 E-mail leonardo.caporali@isnb.it

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3 **Introduction**

4 Inherited optic neuropathies (ION) include two major entities: the first is maternally inherited
5 Leber hereditary optic neuropathy (LHON) (MIM #535000), typically caused by homoplasmic
6 mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) point mutations. The second is autosomal dominant optic atrophy
7 (ADOA) (MIM #165500), which is predominantly caused by heterozygous pathogenic variants in
8 the *OPA1* gene encoded by nuclear DNA (nDNA).¹⁻³ Both affect respiratory complex I (CI, EC
9 7.1.1.2), the largest enzymatic complex of the mitochondrial electron transfer system which is
10 composed in humans by 45 unique subunits. Those are assembled in functionally and
11 evolutionarily distinctive modules, namely the NADH dehydrogenase module (N), the quinone
12 binding module (Q) and the proton pumping module (P), the latter being further subdivided in two
13 proximal submodules (ND1- and ND2-submodules) and two distal submodules (ND4- and ND5-
14 submodules).⁴ Indeed, the three most common mtDNA pathogenic variants associated with LHON
15 affect genes (*MT-ND1*, *MT-ND4*, *MT-ND6*) encoding CI core subunits, directly impairing the
16 complex catalytic function.¹ In contrast, *OPA1* variants associated with ADOA do not directly
17 affect CI, as its enzymatic activity remains normal,⁵ but instead influence CI-driven oxidative
18 phosphorylation efficiency likely due to disrupted mitochondrial dynamics and *cristae*
19 morphology.^{6,7}

20 In addition to the classic clinical manifestation of isolated optic atrophy (OA), both LHON and
21 ADOA can also manifest with syndromic phenotypes described under the broader LHON and
22 ADOA “plus” groups.¹⁻³ These phenotypes may arise from more severe and rarer mtDNA
23 pathogenic variants for LHON plus,⁸⁻¹⁰ or from specific missense pathogenic variants, mostly
24 affecting the GTPase domain of the OPA1 protein, in the case of ADOA plus.^{11,12}

25 Beyond the well-established associations of mtDNA-LHON and *OPA1*-ADOA, the genetic
26 landscape of optic neuropathies has expanded to include several other nDNA-encoded genes or
27 *loci* (also identified as OPA2-16), which underly both autosomal dominant, recessive and X-linked
28 inheritance patterns.^{13,14} In this broader context of newly identified ION-related genes, the role of
29 CI dysfunction in the pathogenesis of optic nerve pathology remains of utmost importance.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

1 Overall, an increasing number of nuclear CI-related genes have recently been recognized as
2 genetic causes of autosomal recessive LHON (arLHON), including core subunits, accessory
3 subunits, and assembly factors (i.e. *NDUFS2*, *NDUFS7*, *NDUFA12*, *NDUFAF2*, *NDUFAF5*).¹⁸⁻²²
4 Furthermore, a gene involved in CI N module turnover and quality control, *DNAJC30*, has
5 emerged as a relatively frequent cause of arLHON (LHONAR1, MIM #619382) undistinguishable
6 from LHON caused by mtDNA pathogenic variants.^{23,24} Finally, *TMEM126A*, a gene responsible
7 for isolated or syndromic OA with recessive inheritance (OPA7, MIM #612989),²⁵⁻²⁷ has been
8 found to encode a key factor for CI biogenesis, interacting with the ND4 module.²⁸⁻³⁰

9 Finally, it is important to note that most pathogenic variants in nuclear subunits of CI are typically
10 associated with CI deficiency and severe early-onset phenotypes, mainly attributable to autosomal
11 recessive Leigh Syndrome (LS) or Leigh-like Syndrome (LLS) spectrum.³¹ While the clinical
12 presentation of LS is highly variable and complex, visual impairment due to OA is a recurrent
13 feature in about 15 % of patients, though ophthalmic evaluation may not always be performed,
14 especially in very young and severely affected patients.³²

15 In the current study, we identified a significant role of biallelic defects in CI nuclear-encoded
16 subunits as a mechanism of ION, also including arLHON, while such findings have previously
17 been recognized in only a handful of cases.¹⁴ Moreover, in this international cohort we describe
18 patients with an OA plus or LLS presentation, harboring variants in otherwise scarcely reported
19 CI subunits. Finally, we present evidence that a structural approach considering subunit location
20 as well as specific aminoacidic substitutions can shed some light on the phenotypic and genetic
21 diversity observed.

22

23 **Materials and methods**

24 **Clinical evaluation**

25 Clinical assessments included best-corrected visual acuity (BCVA) by Snellen charts extrapolated
26 to decimal values, color vision tests, slit-lamp biomicroscopy, tonometry, color fundus
27 photography, optical coherence tomography (OCT; Cirrus, Carl Zeiss Meditec Inc., Dublin, CA,
28 USA; DRI Triton, Topcon, Tokyo, Japan or SPECTRALIS spectral-domain-OCT, Heidelberg

1 Engineering GmbH, Heidelberg, Germany), automated visual field test (Humphrey Field
2 Analyzer, protocol Sita Standard 30-2/24-2; Zeiss, San Leandro, CA or M-700, Medmont
3 International, Vermont, Australia). OCT protocols included the evaluation of peripapillary retinal
4 nerve fiber layer (pRNFL) thickness (3.4 acquisition protocol).

5 **Genetic investigations**

6 The genetic testing for each patient was approved by ethical committees of respective institutes
7 and authorized by informed consent. Sequencing of nuclear genes was performed after complete
8 mtDNA sequencing that excluded the presence of pathogenic variants. In the different institutions,
9 NGS screenings were performed as follows: target gene panel for mitochondrial disorders at
10 IRCCS Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta, Milano, IT (Families B, H, I, L) and at Charles University
11 and General University Hospital, Prague, CZ (Family M); clinical exome at Moorfields Eye
12 Hospital, London, UK (Families C and T) and at IRCCS Ospedale Pediatrico Bambino Gesù,
13 Roma, IT (Families D, G, H, J); whole exome sequencing at IRCCS Istituto delle Scienze
14 Neurologiche di Bologna, Bologna, IT (Families A, E, K, G, N, O, P, R, S) and at TUM Klinikum,
15 Munich, DE (Family U); and whole genome sequencing at Moorfields Eye Hospital, London, UK
16 (Families F, Q, V, W).

17 Methods used in NGS data generation and processing, including variant filtering and prioritization
18 are reported in the Supplementary Methods. The details of all NGS screenings performed and
19 quality metrics obtained are reported in Supplementary Table 1.

20 Variant classification was performed according to ACMG guidelines, using the REVEL score of
21 meta-prediction for the application of PP3/BP4 criteria, then also adapted through the use of
22 targeted modeling (see “In silico prediction of pathogenicity” paragraph).^{33–35}

23 **In silico prediction of pathogenicity**

24 To unravel the functional role of newly identified variants associated with OA and to search for
25 possible functional differences between them and those previously reported in the literature as
26 causative for LS/LLS, we conducted a comprehensive *in silico* analysis. The current literature
27 (updated to February 2025) was searched to produce a list of pathogenic variants in the genes
28 found in the current study. For each article we collected PMID number, genetic variants, main

1 phenotype, and information about the proband and alleles (summarized in Supplementary Table
2 2).

3 Firstly, for each variant we used two different tools to calculate the impact of missense variants on
4 protein folding by calculating the $\Delta\Delta G$ induced by every variant, namely DynaMut2³⁶ and
5 DUET³⁷, with the latter utilizing predictions made by mCSM³⁸ and SDM³⁹. These tools have been
6 chosen because they performed the best in benchmarking experiments among the publicly
7 available web services.⁴⁰ We considered the variants as impacting on protein folding only when
8 both predictors coherently showed a value of $\Delta\Delta G$ that exceeds (in positive or negative) the root
9 mean square error (RMSE) indicated for each predictor, that is ± 1.02 kcal/mol and ± 0.98 kcal/mol
10 for DynaMut2 and DUET respectively. When the prediction was not consistent for the two tools,
11 we considered the effect on that variant as uncertain. The structures used to exploit these tools
12 were PDB id 5XTD for human CI,⁴¹ and those predicted by AlphaFold 3 (AF3)⁴² for NDUFAF2,
13 NDUFAF3, NDUFAF4 and NDUFAF8. For these predicted structures, we performed the $\Delta\Delta G$
14 calculation only if the segment affected by the variant had a predicted Local Distance Difference
15 Test score pLDDT > 70, corresponding to a high confidence of the prediction. Lastly, we mapped
16 the amino acid affected by variants on human CI structure and predicted structures, performed *in*
17 *silico* mutagenesis and, when possible, we investigated their involvement in the formation of
18 protein-protein interaction (PPI) and the characteristics of the interfaces by using PDBePISA.⁴³
19 Mitochondrial targeting sequences (MTS) were identified using MTSviewer⁴⁴ and variants
20 reported on the 3D structure predicted by AF3. For NDUFAF3 N-terminal, which is not modelled
21 as an α -helix by AF3, we predicted the secondary structure using JPred4⁴⁵ and generated a
22 structural model of the first 32 amino acids using UCSF ChimeraX 1.8.⁴⁶ The same software was
23 used for the visual inspections and the modelling of the variants, exploiting the *swapa* tool.

24 For the adjustment of ACMG PP3/BP4 criteria of variants described in our cases, we combined
25 evidence from the two $\Delta\Delta G$ modeling tools with two sequence-based tools that provide prediction
26 about structural impact of amino acid changes, namely Alpha Missense (AM)⁴⁷ and PrimateAI-3D
27 (PAI-3D)⁴⁸. The calibrated prediction scores (ranging from 0 to 1) and pathogenicity prediction
28 categories (likely benign, ambiguous, or likely pathogenic for AM, benign or pathogenic for PAI-
29 3D) are reported in Supplementary Tables 5-7. When all the approaches for structural evaluation
30 were concordant in identifying a variant as damaging, we applied an upgraded PP3 criterion as

1 reported in Supplementary Table 3. The same algorithm was applied for variants affecting the
2 MTS, taking its specific modeling in substitution to $\Delta\Delta G$ prediction.

3 **Quantitative Proteomics**

4 TMT-labelled mass spectrometry was performed at the BayBioMS core facility of the Technical
5 University of Munich described by Kopajtich et al. with two minor modifications.⁴⁹ Peptide
6 fractionation was carried out using high pH reversed phase instead of trimodal mixed-mode
7 chromatography and TMT-labelling was carried out using TMT 11-plex instead of TMT 10-plex
8 reagent. Quantification of NDUFAF5 protein and complex I subunits has been carried out in a
9 single TMT batch of 11 samples.

10 Data normalization and expression outlier analysis was conducted using PROTRIDER⁵⁰ in a
11 dataset of n=815 fibroblast samples.

12

13 **Results**

14 **Variants in multiple CI nuclear subunits are associated with optic** 15 **neuropathy**

16 We identified biallelic or hemizygous candidate pathogenic genotypes in 11 different genes
17 encoding subunits of respiratory CI across 31 patients from 23 families. These patients had no
18 putative causative variants in the mitochondrial genome or in other nuclear genes associated with
19 OA (Fig. 1, Table 1). The identified variants were located in 3 core subunits (*NDUFS7*, *NDUFV1*,
20 *NDUFV2*), 4 accessory subunits (*NDUFA1*, *NDUFA10*, *NDUFA12*, *NDUFB11*), and 4 assembly
21 factors (*NDUFAF2*, *NDUFAF3*, *NDUFAF4*, *NDUFAF8*). Overall, based on ACMG criteria, we
22 classified 10 variants as pathogenic, 6 variants as likely pathogenic, and 4 variants as VUS
23 (Supplementary Table 3). For these latter missense variants, additional evidence coming from
24 recurrence in independent families and *in silico* modeling were integrated in the ACMG
25 classification.

1 The combined prevalence of CI-related nuclear genes (as listed in Supplementary Methods) in
2 ION was assessed on a subset of the cohort, screened at Italian and German diagnostic centers. A
3 total of 836 probands were subjected to WES with a yield of 45% cases where genetics findings
4 were reported. This cohort included 38 cases harboring variants in CI nuclear genes, increasing
5 the total diagnostic yield by 5% and representing 10% of all solved cases.

6 Patients exhibited a broad spectrum of clinical manifestations, ranging from isolated OA to OA
7 ‘plus’, which included features such as nystagmus, Wolff-Parkinson-White (WPW) syndrome,
8 hearing impairment, intellectual disability, seizures, cerebellar ataxia, peripheral axonal
9 neuropathy, and LLS with basal ganglia and brainstem abnormalities (Fig. 2, Tables 2 and 3,
10 Supplementary Table 4). The OA onset was either insidious during childhood or presented
11 acutely/subacutely in young adulthood, resembling the clinical course of LHON (Tables 2 and 3,
12 Supplementary Table 4). Pharmacological treatments for OA included idebenone, CoQ10,
13 riboflavin, and ubidecarenone at variable dosages. Visual improvement was variable, with only
14 three patients out of 13 showing some degree of response to idebenone treatment (Supplementary
15 Table 4).

16 We evaluated structural properties and pathogenicity prediction for missense variants identified in
17 our cohort, as well as for those previously reported in the literature, also associated with other
18 phenotypes (Supplementary Table 2). Specifically, we combined structure-based prediction tools
19 such as Alpha Missense and PrimateAI-3D with an estimation of impact on protein folding ($\Delta\Delta G$)
20 to add a line of pathogenicity evidence to a commonly used meta-prediction tool (REVEL). Full
21 data regarding pathogenicity prediction and $\Delta\Delta G$ values are reported in Supplementary Tables 5-
22 7 and discussed together with mapping and *in silico* mutagenesis for each affected polypeptide.

23 **Defects in core CI subunits lead to isolated optic atrophy**

24 Eight patients from seven families (A-G) carried previously unreported variants in *NDUFS7*,
25 *NDUFV1*, or *NDUFV2*, encoding core subunits of CI (Fig. 3A). These patients typically exhibited
26 isolated OA, with either an insidious onset during childhood or an acute/subacute onset similar to
27 LHON in young adulthood (16-25 years range, Table 2). At last clinical evaluation, no significant
28 new symptoms were reported, except for nystagmus in the proband of Family A and Wolff-
29 Parkinson-White (WPW) syndrome in the proband of Family E. Additionally, a subclinical

1 hyperintensity of the posterior part of the cervical spinal cord was noted in the proband of Family
2 G, carrying *NDUFV2* variants, likely attributable to vitamin B12 deficiency (Tables 2 and 3).

3 ***NDUFS7* (NM_024407.5)**

4 The proband from Family A was found to carry both a missense variant c.223C>T p.(R75C) and
5 a small indel c.559_564delinsTAGAT p.(A187*). The homozygous variant c.298C>T p.(R100C)
6 was detected in affected individuals from families B and C, while the homozygous variant
7 c.313C>T p.(R105C) was found in affected individuals from families D and E, making *NDUFS7*
8 the most commonly affected gene in our case series. The missense variants p.(R100C) and
9 p.(R105C) were predicted as pathogenic by AM and PAI-3D, while p.(R75C) was classified as
10 ambiguous by AM. The $\Delta\Delta G$ values for these variants were inconsistently predicted by DynaMut2
11 and DUET, thus being classified as uncertain for their potential impact of the subunit folding. The
12 five variants previously reported in the literature are predicted as likely pathogenic by AM, while
13 PAI-3D classifies all of them as pathogenic except for p.(P144L) and p.(R145H), which
14 nevertheless show high pathogenicity scores (Supplementary Table 5). Among these variants,
15 p.(L126F), p.(R145H) and p.(R168S) associated with LS were also predicted to have an impact on
16 protein folding based on their $\Delta\Delta G$ values. The most striking difference between variants
17 previously reported and those described here is their location within the 3D structure of CI. Indeed,
18 the first ones grouped together close to the Fe-S cluster N2, associated with the ubiquinone
19 (coenzyme Q10, CoQ10) binding site, while the latter are situated in the N-terminal of the subunit
20 (Fig. 3B). Specifically, p.(R100) and p.(R105) are positioned peripherally in an external region of
21 the subunit and are involved in the formation of PPI interfaces with *NDUFS2*, *NDUFS8*, *NDUFA7*
22 and *NDUFA12*. These are distinct from the remaining variants, which mediate the interactions
23 between *NDUFS7* and *NDUFS3*, *NDUFA9* and *ND3* (Supplementary Table 8). Notably, p.R100
24 forms a hydrogen bond with p.E208 of *NDUFS2* using its side chain (distance 3.29Å), meaning
25 this interaction could be disrupted by the variants identified in families B and C, while the side
26 chain of p.R105 is H-bonded with p.I82 of *NDUFS8* (distance 3.89Å), which may be compromised
27 by the variant found in families D and E. The only subunit interacting with *NDUFS7* using residues
28 from both cohorts is *ND1*, which forms a PPI interface involving both p.R75 (Family A) and
29 p.R105 (families D and E), as well as p.P144 which is also mutated in a published OA case.²¹

1 ***NDUFV1* (NM_007103.4)**

2 The proband from Family F carried the homozygous variant c.1156C>A p.(R386S), at a known
3 mutational hotspot of *NDUFV1*, where pathogenic variants p.(R386C) and p.(R386H) have
4 previously been described in several LS patients following the first published cases.^{51,52} Among
5 the subunits studied, *NDUFV1* harbors the highest number of pathogenic variants, with 28 linked
6 to LS in the literature, that are all are predicted as pathogenic by AM, while PAI-3D classifies
7 17/28 variants as pathogenic and 11/28 as benign (Supplementary Table 5). Some of these variants
8 are predicted to impact protein folding and are generally spread across the protein, though they
9 tend to cluster around specific regions, such as the FMN-binding site and the Fe-S clusters N1a
10 and N3.

11 In particular, p.R386 is located on the subunit surface within the four-helix bundle of the *NDUFV1*
12 subunit and plays a role in forming PPI interface with *NDUFS1* (Fig. 3C, Supplementary Table
13 8). Moreover, it is part of an extended H-bond network involving its guanidino tail and *NDUFV1*
14 residues p.G380, p.Q381, p.T383, and *NDUFS1* residue p.Q178. Residue p.S386 also forms a π -
15 stacking interaction with the side chains (Supplementary Fig. 1). These interactions could be
16 disrupted when p.R386 is replaced by a shorter amino acid, such as serine, cysteine or histidine.
17 However, it remains unclear how the specific serine substitution would cause a milder phenotype
18 compared to its substitution with cysteine or histidine. No clear biochemical differences can be
19 inferred from the available data, aside from the proximity of residue 386 to the Fe-S cluster N3,
20 which may undergo positional shifts in the presence of cysteine, potentially affecting its function.

21 ***NDUFV2* (NM_021074.5)**

22 The proband from Family G was found to carry compound heterozygous c.163T>G p.(F55V) and
23 c.674G>A p.(C225Y) variants. Both of these variants, along with the five variants reported in the
24 literature, are all predicted to be pathogenic (Fig. 3D). Two of these are likely to affect protein
25 folding, namely p.(F55V) found in the present cohort and p.(E194K) already reported in literature
26 (Supplementary Table 5). The two OA-associated variants are located at distant sites, with no
27 apparent mutational hotspots also considering the LS-associated variants (Fig. 3D). *NDUFV2*
28 forms several PPIs with *NDUFV1*, *NDUFV3*, *NDUFS1*, *NDUFS4* and *NDUFS6* (Supplementary
29 Table 8). Among these interactions, only the interface with *NDUFV1* contains mutated residues,
30 specifically p.C225 (mutated in Family G) and p.T232 (reported in the literature).

1 Defects in accessory CI subunits lead to a spectrum from isolated to 2 syndromic optic atrophy

3 Ten patients from eight families (Families H-O) carried hemizygous variants in *NDUFA1* or
4 *NDUFB11* genes, or biallelic variants in *NDUFA10* or *NDUFA12*, encoding accessory subunits of
5 CI. In all patients, OA began during childhood, except for family N, which exhibited a LHON-like
6 onset. Most patients, except families M and N, showed signs of syndromic disease, including
7 hearing impairment, intellectual disability, and movement disorders associated with basal ganglia
8 abnormalities, seizures and cerebellar ataxia. Bilateral pallidal and dentate hyperintensity was
9 observed in only one patient (Family H) (Fig.2E-F). Cerebellar atrophy was reported in 2 cases
10 (Family J and L). One patient (Family K) also had multiple sclerosis (MS). (Tables 2 and 3)

11 *NDUFA1* (NM_004541.4)

12 The probands from families H and I both carried the novel missense variant c.28T>C p.(S10P);
13 while the proband of Family J carried the missense variant c.55C>T p.(P19S), which has been
14 reported in two published cases of LS.^{53,54} This subunit contains four variants previously reported
15 in the literature, along with two novel variants identified in our cohort for which pathogenicity
16 predictions by AM and PAI-3D are uncertain, as well as their impact on $\Delta\Delta G$ (Supplementary
17 Table 6). Focusing on the variants identified in this study, p.(P19S) is predicted to be pathogenic
18 and to affect protein folding, while p.(S10P) is generally reported as benign. However, this variant
19 was found in two independent families, with no alleles present the gnomAD v4.1 dataset,
20 supporting its pathogenicity. When mapping the variants in the 3D structure model, OA-associated
21 variants are located in the N-terminal helix of *NDUFA1*, where the p.(G8R) variant (reported in
22 the literature) also resides (Fig. 4B). The other LS-associated variants are located in the loop
23 connecting the two main α -helices. Notably, residues from the N-terminal region are involved in
24 forming a PPI with ND1, similarly to *NDUFS7*. We hypothesize that the p.(P19S) variant could
25 result in the formation of a longer transmembrane helix that, in turn, could impact the protein
26 folding, as predicted by high variations in $\Delta\Delta G$ values. However, the effect of p.(S10P) variant
27 remains difficult to define, even if proline insertion into α -helices is often disruptive.

1 ***NDUFA10* (NM_004544.4)**

2 The proband from families K and L carried the homozygous in-frame deletion c.233_235del
3 p.(A78del). This variant has been previously reported in a case of LS, in *trans* with c.296G>A
4 p.(G99E).⁵⁵ Two siblings from Family M harbored the homozygous missense variant c.1009C>T
5 p.(R337C); this genotype has been previously reported in a patient with ataxia, hypotonia and
6 developmental regression.⁵⁶ In total, five missense variants have been reported in this subunit in
7 LS cases, including the p.(R337C) variant identified in the present cohort, highlighting that other
8 genetic factors likely modulate the clinical phenotype in these patients (Supplementary Table 6,
9 Fig. 4C). While the in-frame deletion of residue p.A78 can be predicted as pathogenic for the lack
10 of the single amino acid, missense variants are variably predicted by AM and PAI-3D. However,
11 p.(R337C) shows an impact on protein folding with a significant divergent value of $\Delta\Delta G$
12 (Supplementary Table 6). Additionally, in the 3D structure p.G99 and p.R337 are in close
13 proximity and are involved in PPI interfaces with NDUFC1, NDUFC2 and ND2 (Fig. 4C and
14 Supplementary Table 8). Specifically, the p.(R337C) variant could induce a reduction in steric
15 bulk affecting the protein folding, while p.(G99E) may form a salt bridge with p.R337, thus
16 impacting on the flexibility of the loop containing p.G99.

17 ***NDUFA12* (NM_018838.5)**

18 Two siblings from Family N were found to be homozygous for the novel stop-gain variant
19 c.69T>G p.(Y23*). To date, only loss-of-function (LoF) variants have been identified in this
20 subunit. Nevertheless, a complex phenotypic spectrum characterizes *NDUFA12* cases and even
21 the arLHON phenotype as observed in our cases has been reported.^{19,57}

22 ***NDUFB11* (NM_019056.7)**

23 The proband from Family O carried the hemizygous in frame deletion c.276_278del p.(F93del),
24 which was first described as a recurrent variant in patients with syndromic sideroblastic anemia
25 due to CI deficiency (with myopathy, lactic acidosis, optic atrophy).⁵⁸ Three missense variants in
26 this subunit have been reported in the literature (Supplementary Table 6), and they are distributed
27 along the entire length of the protein without clear hotspots (Fig. 4D). From the protein interaction
28 perspective, NDUFB11 interacts with 11 subunits, including ND4 through the residues p.F93 and

1 p.P110 (Supplementary Table 7), suggesting these residues play a critical role in the assembly of
2 CI.

3 **Defects in assembly CI factors lead to a spectrum from isolated to** 4 **syndromic optic atrophy**

5 Thirteen patients from eight families (Families P-W) carried compound heterozygous variants in
6 *NDUFAF2*, *NDUFAF3*, *NDUFAF4* or *NDUFAF8*, encoding assembly factors of CI. Six patients
7 out of 13, carrying *NDUFAF2*, *NDUFAF4* or *NDUFAF8* variants, showed a LHON-like
8 phenotype (Tables 2 and 3). All three patients from Family P and Q, carrying variants in
9 *NDUFAF2*, showed OA and peripheral axonal neuropathy, while the single patient harboring
10 *NDUFAF3* variants showed LLS with basal ganglia hyperintensity (Fig.2C-D) and motor delay.
11 The phenotype associated with variants in *NDUFAF4* was characterized by isolated OA in all three
12 patients, as observed also for five out of six patients with *NDUFAF8* variants; the remaining
13 proband also exhibited cerebellar ataxia and nystagmus. One of the patients carrying *NDUFAF4*
14 variants who presented with insidious OA also suffered at the age of 17 years a LHON-like visual
15 loss.⁵⁹ Additionally, basal ganglia/brainstem abnormalities, white matter changes, and cerebellar
16 atrophy were reported in most cases. The *in-silico* analyses were performed for these polypeptides
17 based on the structures generated by AF3 (Fig. 5 and Supplementary Table 7).

18 ***NDUFAF2* (NM_174889.5)**

19 Two affected siblings from Family P carried the novel missense variant c.95A>G p.(Y32C) and
20 the frameshift variant c.148del p.(R50Efs*3), which was recently reported in *trans* with c.139C>T,
21 p.(R47*) in a patient with an LHON-like phenotype.²⁰ The proband from family Q carried the
22 homozygous nonsense variant c.114C>G, p.(Y38*), which was known from a patient with LS.⁶⁰
23 The amino acid change p.Y32C is the first missense pathogenic variant described and lies in a well
24 modelled antiparallel β -sheet (Fig. 5A). This variant is predicted as pathogenic by both AM and
25 PAI-3D, highlighting a possible detrimental effect on protein function.

26 ***NDUFAF3* (NM_199069.2)**

27 The proband from Family R carried the novel variant c.5C>A, p.(A2D) and the c.489_490del
28 p.(G164Sfs*29) already reported in a LS case.⁶¹ The p.(A2D) variant is located at the N-terminal

1 of NDUFAF3, in contrast to the five other variants reported in the literature, associated with LS
2 and predicted as pathogenic, affecting amino acids in the well-modelled globular C-terminal
3 portion of the protein (Fig. 5B). The N-terminal (aa 1-31) is predicted by MTSviewer as a
4 canonical MTS but is not well modelled by AF3. However, when the secondary structure is
5 predicted using JPred4, p.(A2D) amino acid change is found to disrupt the positively charged
6 surface of the N-terminal amphipathic α -helix, thus possibly impacting the protein import.

7 ***NDUFAF4* (NM_014165.4)**

8 The proband from Family S carried the novel biallelic variants c.224del p.(P75Lfs*7) and
9 c.413T>C p.(I138T), with the latter variant also found in the homozygous state in the two affected
10 siblings from Family T. The p.I138T variant is predicted as pathogenic and is likely to destabilize
11 the protein folding (Supplementary Table 7). This amino acid lies in a well-modelled globular
12 domain of NDUFAF4 (Fig. 5C), clearly distant from those LS-associated reported in literature
13 affecting the N-terminal, which are ambiguous in terms of pathogenicity prediction, but may affect
14 the import of this assembly factor.

15 ***NDUFAF8* (NM_001086521.2)**

16 The siblings from Family U carried the homozygous novel missense variant c.44T>G p.(L15R),
17 while the probands from families V and W carried the homozygous deep intronic variant
18 c.195+271C>T p.?. This latter variant was already described in two independent families affected
19 by LS, in compound heterozygosity with pathogenic alleles, and it was confirmed to induce
20 transcript decay.⁶² The AF3 model is moderately accurate for the N-terminal α -helix where the
21 p.L15 residue is located, however the change is predicted to be part of the MTS introducing a
22 positive charge on the hydrophobic side of the amphipathic α -helix (Fig. 5D), possibly affecting
23 NDUFAF8 import into the mitochondria.

24 To validate the impact of the p.L15R variant at the protein level, we performed quantitative
25 proteomics on fibroblasts derived from individual II-4 in a batch of 11 samples. NDUFAF8 protein
26 was not detected in the whole TMT 11-plex batch, not allowing us to directly evaluate the variant
27 effect. However, we observed a strong reduction of NDUFAF5 protein (fold change: 0.18,
28 Supplementary Fig. 2A), another CI assembly factor known to require NDUFAF8 for its

1 stability.⁶² Moreover, a moderate reduction of CI protein level (mean fold change: 0.73) was
2 observed, indicating an impaired assembly pathway (Supplementary Fig. 2B).

3 **Variants of uncertain significance of mtDNA in recessive OA cases**

4 It is now established that a clinical phenotype of LS can result from digenic variants in CI subunits
5 encoded in both nuclear and mitochondrial genomes.⁶³ To explore this phenomenon in our cohort,
6 we also investigated the affected individuals' mtDNA sequence background (Supplementary Table
7 9). No imbalance in major haplogroups frequency was observed over the 23 Families of the cohort,
8 where we observed haplogroup C ($n=1$), H ($n=8$), J ($n=3$), M ($n=2$), N ($n=1$), R0 ($n=1$), U ($n=4$),
9 V ($n=1$), X ($n=2$). A total of six families harbored missense variants in mitochondrial CI genes,
10 namely *MT-ND1*, *MT-ND2*, *MT-ND3*, *MT-ND5*, *MT-ND6*. Among those, the proband of Family I
11 carried three different variants in CI genes, including the m.3394T>C/*MT-ND1* already associated
12 with several phenotypes, especially a population-specific LHON.⁶⁴ Two more families carried
13 missense variants in the ATPase complex, namely m.9025G>A/*MT-ATP6* in Family A, previously
14 reported in a LS case,⁶⁵ and m.8555T>C/*MT-ATP6* in Family N.

15

16 **Discussion**

17 This study describes a series of 31 affected individuals from 23 families in whom OA was the
18 primary phenotype, with some cases showing additional symptoms and pathogenic variants in
19 nuclear-encoded CI subunits. Overall, we associate for the first time the arLHON phenotype with
20 variants in *NDUFAF4* and *NDUFAF8* genes, and we consolidate *NDUFS7*, *NDUFV1*, and
21 *NDUFAF2* variants as causative for arLHON, while previously reported in single families.^{20,21}
22 Furthermore, isolated or plus OA was found for the first time in *NDUFV2*, *NDUFA1*, *NDUFA10*,
23 and *NDUFAF3* families, for which only a single report of arLHON existed for a patient carrying
24 *NDUFA10* variants.⁶⁶

25 In all patients, previous genetic screening excluded the involvement of mtDNA or other optic
26 neuropathies-related genes. Clinically, a subset of these patients experienced a subacute loss of
27 vision resembling LHON, while others had an insidious onset of OA in childhood. It remains
28 poorly understood what drives the difference in disease onset, the subacute deterioration of visual

1 acuity in adolescence or young-adult age hallmarking LHON, as opposed to the more insidious
2 onset in childhood, as typically seen for *OPA1*-DOA. However, as already well described, even in
3 LHON pedigrees with mtDNA common variants both kinds of disease onset may be seen.⁶⁷ While
4 OA was an isolated feature in about half of the patients, others exhibited broader involvement of
5 the central and peripheral nervous systems, with manifestations ranging from peripheral
6 neuropathy and sensory neural ataxia to nystagmus, neurosensory hearing impairment, basal
7 ganglia lesions, and LLS features. Extra-neurological features included megaloblastic anemia and
8 WPW syndrome, whereas lactic acidosis was a frequent laboratory finding. These findings greatly
9 expand the genetic landscape of recessive OA, including arLHON, suggesting that LS/LLS and
10 OA/arLHON are the two extremes of a phenotypic spectrum with variable severity seen more
11 frequently than previously thought.

12 To understand the possible genotype-phenotype correlation, we categorized the CI subunits
13 carrying the pathogenic variants according to their function in the complex, with three main groups
14 including core subunits, accessory subunits, and assembly factors. The variants in the CI core
15 subunits (*NDUFS7*, *NDUFV1*, and *NDUFV2*) were associated with isolated OA in six out of eight
16 patients, with only one case also having upbeat nystagmus and another one WPW syndrome. Half
17 of these patients can be categorized as arLHON/arLHON plus based on disease onset and
18 progression.

19 It is important to note that among the 14 core subunits of CI, three are the most affected by primary
20 LHON variants, namely ND1, ND4 and ND6, suggesting that functions carried out by the
21 catalytically competent enzyme core may be phenotypically linked to subacute vision loss
22 characterizing LHON. Congruently with this observation, the first report describing arLHON
23 found biallelic variants in *NDUFS2* which is a core subunit.¹⁷ Indeed, core subunits are responsible
24 for the redox activity and proton translocation,³⁰ as well as for the recently proposed function of
25 mitochondrial Na^+/H^+ exchanger,⁶⁸ which seems to be involved in the pathogenetic mechanism of
26 the classic LHON mutation m.11778G>A/MT-ND4.

27 Defects in CI accessory subunits may also have a pronounced impact on the complex structure and
28 function, similar to what is observed for the core subunits.⁶⁹ However, the pathogenic variants
29 affecting accessory subunits (*NDUFA1*, *NDUFA10*, *NDUFA12*, *NDUFB11*) were more frequently
30 associated with OA plus (in five out of ten patients) and LLS phenotype (in one patient). Only two

1 families carrying *NDUFA10* and *NDUFA12* variants presented with isolated OA. This may be
2 related to the role of accessory subunits, most of which are known to be necessary for human CI
3 assembly and stability.⁶⁹ In this frame, variants in accessory subunits may induce clinical
4 phenotypes which are more similar to those caused by variants in assembly factors. Indeed, in the
5 latter category (*NDUFAF2*, *NDUFAF3*, *NDUFAF4*, *NDUFAF8*), we observed both isolated and
6 plus OA phenotypes for the 13 patients, including one LLS case. For example, both families
7 harboring variants in *NDUFAF4* showed isolated OA, whereas all three *NDUFAF2* patients had
8 multisystemic involvement. Given their role in the CI assembly, predicting their functional impact
9 *in silico* is challenging due to varying levels of partially assembled sub-complexes and residual CI
10 activity, that should be demonstrated experimentally.

11 The core subunits described for our cohort are all located in the matrix portion of the complex,
12 specifically in module N (*NDUFV1* and *NDUFV2*) and module Q (*NDUFS7*), which also interacts
13 with the accessory subunits *NDUFA1* and *NDUFA12* that are connected to the membrane arm.⁷⁰
14 The assembly factors in which we identified pathogenic variants are variously involved in CI
15 assembly. In fact, according to complexome profiling studies *NDUFAF3* and *NDUFAF4* are
16 necessary for the early connection of the Q module to *ND1*, *NDUFAF2* is involved in the late
17 maturation of the Q module, while *NDUFAF8* contributing to early stabilization of *NDUFS7*
18 together with *NDUFAF5*.^{62,71} This latter polypeptide, lacking from our cohort, has recently been
19 found mutated in two cases showing OA/arLHON.^{22,72} Since *NDUFS2* and *DNAJC30* are as well
20 part of, or involved in, stability of the peripheral arm of CI, this portion of the complex appears to
21 be a hotspot for recessive OA variants.

22 Our structural analysis also uncovered a possible segregation of variants either linked to LS or OA
23 in different parts of *NDUFS7*, the subunit most frequently affected in our OA cohort, that is located
24 at the connection of peripheral and membrane arms of CI and is involved in the formation of the
25 CoQ binding site.⁷³ Notably, the variants identified here clustered around the N-terminal region
26 and formed PPI with subunits such as *NDUFS2*, *NDUFA12*, and *ND1*, which have been
27 commonly linked to OA and LHON/arLHON phenotypes in literature.

28 Using up-to-date structural prediction tools, like Alpha Missense and PrimateAI-3D, together with
29 $\Delta\Delta G$ investigations, we were able to apply more precise criteria for pathogenicity prediction (PP3)
30 of missense variants according to ACMG. Therefore, for 6 out of 13 missense variants we found

1 evidence supporting a damaging role of the aminoacidic change, where REVEL meta-prediction
2 was unable to assess the effect. Notably, we identified two variants affecting the properties of the
3 MTS of NDUFAF3 and NDUFAF8, proving experimentally for the latter that the pathogenic
4 variant impact on NDUFAF8 abundance into the mitochondria and affect CI assembly. The only
5 variant lacking support to a pathogenic role based on structural evidence is p.(S10P) in NDUFA1,
6 which would require further functional investigations. In-depth modeling could therefore help in
7 the improvement of ACMG criteria assessment beyond the commonly available prediction and
8 meta-prediction tools' results.

9 An important observation to highlight is the clinical variability that can occur with the same
10 pathogenic variant in different individuals. For example, in two siblings homozygous for the
11 *NDUFA10* p.(R337C) variant we observed isolated OA, whereas a previously published case with
12 the same amino acid change was reported with multisystemic involvement.⁵⁶ Even within the same
13 family we observed discordant phenotypes, as in the case of Family V carrying the recurrent
14 *NDUFAF8* c.195+271C>T intronic variant, here associated with either isolated or plus arLHON
15 phenotype. The phenotypic variability may be influenced by multiple factors, including genetic
16 modifiers in both mitochondrial and nuclear genomes, as well as exposure to environmental factors
17 as well documented for LHON.⁷⁴

18 We also note the presence of mtDNA variants with possible functional impact but without clear-
19 cut pathogenicity in some of the patients from our cohort. A plausible hypothesis is that mtDNA
20 variants could act synergistically with nDNA variants to exacerbate disease severity. However, an
21 epistatic interaction might also counterbalance the effect of amino acid changes in nuclear
22 subunits. Predicting the interaction between multiple specific variants remains challenging and
23 would likely require advanced molecular dynamics modeling, at least for those affecting the same
24 protein complexes, or *in-vitro/in-vivo* functional validation. For instance, the m.3394T>C/MT-
25 ND1 variant, identified in Family I, was reported to interact with m.11778G>A/MT-ND4,
26 increasing LHON penetrance of LHON,⁷⁵ and with haplogroup and environmental,⁷⁶ becoming
27 benign or pathogenic depending on the context.

28 Moreover, in Family A proband we detected both biallelic *NDUFS7* variants and the m.9025G>A
29 variant in *MT-ATP6* reported as pathogenic, with yeast validation in support.⁷⁷ However, it is
30 relatively frequent in healthy controls (i.e. 45/56418 homoplasmic cases in gnomAD v4.1) and its

1 role in disease modulation is unclear. Strikingly, a few reports attributed a pathogenic role to *MT-*
2 *ATP6* variants in LHON patients.^{65,78} However, noticeably these probands were singleton cases
3 without any evidence of maternal inheritance, raising doubt that as evidenced by the 3 cases found
4 in this study, the real molecular defect resides in nuclear genes.

5 In conclusion, our study demonstrates that OA, whether LHON-like or with insidious early onset,
6 is frequently consequent upon biallelic or hemizygous variants in nuclear genes involved in CI
7 structure and assembly. Moreover, OA can be part of the LS/LLS spectrum more commonly
8 known for the nuclear CI genes, but can also occur as an isolated feature. Our study prompts a
9 change in the diagnostic algorithm for ION patients, that should now always include the screening
10 of all known CI-related genes, as, although individually rare, their combined prevalence can be
11 comparable to other well-established ION genes, as reported by other studies.^{16,17,66} Finally, these
12 patients may benefit from treatment with idebenone, following appropriate dosage and standard
13 protocols like those used for LHON. Idebenone, in its reduced form, can bypass CI and transfer
14 electrons from NADH directly to respiratory complex III, thus restoring downstream electron
15 transport chain and oxidative phosphorylation.⁷⁹ In this respect, any CI defect may be partially
16 corrected through the drug's mechanism of action.

18 **Data availability**

19 The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the
20 article and its supplementary material.

21 Raw data were generated in each participating center. Derived data supporting the findings of this
22 study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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4

5 **Competing interests**

6 The authors report no competing interests.

7

8 **Supplementary material**

9 Supplementary material is available at *Brain* online.

10

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5 **Figure legends**

6 **Figure 1 Family trees.** For each available individual the mutated (m) and wild-type (+) alleles are
7 reported. The wild-type Y chromosome (y) is reported when the mutated allele is on X
8 chromosome in males.

9

10 **Figure 2 Illustrative findings in eye and brain imaging.** (A) OCT of both eyes (OO) from
11 Family D, patient II:1 and (B) OCT with RGC analysis of OO from Family R, Patient II:1. Both
12 cases show bilateral diffuse optic nerve atrophy with partial sparing of nasal quadrant. (C) Axial
13 and (D) coronal T2-wi sequences from Family R, Patient II:1, showing hyperintensities, initial
14 atrophy and vacuolar degeneration of putamen and hyperintensity of caudati. (E) and (F) coronal
15 long TR sequences from Family H, Patient II:1, showing bilateral pallidal and dentate
16 hyperintensity.

17

18 **Figure 3 Core subunits' missense variants modeling.** (A) Localization in the CI structure of the
19 core subunits considered in this work. CI is shown in ribbons colored in grey, while the NDUFS7,
20 NDUFV1, and NDUFV2 subunits are shown in yellow green, light blue, and indigo, respectively.
21 Co-factors found in the structure are shown as "balls-and-sticks", colored according to the atom
22 type. The remaining panels show the position of the variants described for NDUFS7 (B), NDUFV1
23 (C) and NDUFV2 (D) subunits. The residues subject to a variation are shown in "spheres", colored
24 as they are described in the literature (dark cyan), in this work (purple), or in both cases (dark
25 green).

26

27 **Figure 4 Accessory subunits' missense variants modeling.** (A) Localization in the CI structure
28 of the accessory subunits considered in this work. CI is shown in ribbons colored in grey, while

1 the NDUFA1, NDUFA10, and NDUFB11 subunits are shown in orange, red and yellow,
2 respectively. Co-factors found in the structure are shown in “balls-and-sticks”, colored according
3 to atom type. The remaining panels show the position of the variants described for NDUFA1 (**B**),
4 NDUFA10 (**C**) and NDUFB11 (**D**) subunits. The residues subject to a variation are shown in
5 “spheres”, colored as they are described in the literature (dark cyan), in this work (purple), or in
6 both cases (dark green).

7
8 **Figure 5 Assembly factors’ missense variants modeling.** The position of the variants described
9 for NDUFAF2 (A), NDUFAF3 (B), NDUFAF4 (C), and NDUFAF8 (D) subunits are shown on
10 the AlphaFold 3 model structures. The residues subject to a variation are shown in “spheres”,
11 colored as they are described in the literature (dark cyan) or in this work (purple). Ribbons are
12 colored according to the AlphaFold 3 predicted local distance difference test confidence score
13 (pLDDT).

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Table I Genetic variants details

| Fa mily | Indivi duals | Opt ic atrophy | Gene | Subunit type, location (module) | Inheri tance | Gen e MI M# | Genotype | Protein |
|---------|------------------|-----------------|----------|---|--------------|-------------|---|--|
| A | II-1 | Plus | NDUF S7 | Core, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6018 25 | NM_024407.5:c.[223C>T];[559 564delinsTAGAT] | NP_077718.3.p.[(Arg75Cys)]; [(Ala187*)] |
| B | II-2 | Isola ted | NDUF S7 | Core, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6018 25 | NM_024407.5:c.[298C>T];[298 C>T] | NP_077718.3.p.[(Arg100Cys)]; [(Arg100Cys)] |
| C | III-1 | Isola ted | NDUF S7 | Core, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6018 25 | NM_024407.5:c.[298C>T];[298 C>T] | NP_077718.3.p.[(Arg100Cys)]; [(Arg100Cys)] |
| D | II-1, II-2 | Isola ted | NDUF S7 | Core, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6018 25 | NM_024407.5:c.[313C>T];[313 C>T] | NP_077718.3.p.[(Arg105Cys)]; [(Arg105Cys)] |
| E | II-1 | Plus | NDUF S7 | Core, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6018 25 | NM_024407.5:c.[313C>T];[313 C>T] | NP_077718.3.p.[(Arg105Cys)]; [(Arg105Cys)] |
| F | III-2 | Isola ted | NDUF V1 | Core, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 1610 15 | NM_007103.4:c.[1156C>A];[11 56C>A] | NP_009034.2.p.[(Arg386Ser)]; [(Arg386Ser)] |
| G | II-1 | Isola ted | NDUF V2 | Core, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6005 32 | NM_021074.5:c.[163T>G];[674 G>A] | NP_066552.2.p.[(Phe55Val)]; [(Cys225Tyr)] |
| H | II-1 | LLS | NDUF A1 | Accessory, membrane arm (P _P) | XLR | 3000 78 | NM_004541.4:c.[28T>C];[0] | NP_004532.1.p.[(Ser10Pro)]; [0] |
| I | II-1 | Plus | NDUF A1 | Accessory, membrane arm (P _P) | XLR | 3000 78 | NM_004541.4:c.[28T>C];[0] | NP_004532.1.p.[(Ser10Pro)]; [0] |
| J | II-1 | Plus | NDUF A1 | Accessory, membrane arm (P _P) | XLR | 3000 78 | NM_004541.4:c.[55C>T];[0] | NP_004532.1.p.[(Pro19Ser)]; [0] |
| K | II-1 | Plus | NDUF A10 | Accessory, membrane arm (P _P) | AR | 6038 35 | NM_004544.4:c.[233_235del];[2 33_235del] | NP_004535.1.p.[(Ala78del)]; [(Ala78del)] |
| L | II-1 | Plus | NDUF A10 | Accessory, membrane arm (P _P) | AR | 6038 35 | NM_004544.4:c.[233_235del];[2 33_235del] | NP_004535.1.p.[(Ala78del)]; [(Ala78del)] |
| M | II-2, II-3 | Isola ted | NDUF A10 | Accessory, membrane arm (P _P) | AR | 6038 35 | NM_004544.4:c.[1009C>T];[10 09C>T] | NP_004535.1.p.[(p.Arg337Cys)]; [(p.Arg337Cys)] |
| N | II-1, II-2 | Isola ted | NDUF A12 | Accessory, peripheral arm (N/Q interface) | AR | 6145 30 | NM_018838.5:c.[69T>G];[69T> G] | NP_061326.1.p.[(Tyr23*)]; [(Tyr23*)] |
| O | II-1 | Plus | NDUF B11 | Accessory, membrane arm (P _D) | XLR | 3004 03 | NM_019056.7:c.[276_278del];[0]] | NP_061929.2.p.[(Phe93del)]; [0] |
| P | II-2, II-4 | Plus | NDUF AF2 | Assembly, peripheral arm (N/Q interface) | AR | 6096 53 | NM_174889.5:c.[95A>G];[148d el] | NP_777549.1.p.[(Tyr32Cys)]; [(Arg50Glufs*3)] |
| Q | II-1 | Plus | NDUF AF2 | Assembly, peripheral arm (N/Q interface) | AR | 6096 53 | NM_174889.5:c.[114C>G];[114 C>G] | NP_777549.1.p.[(Tyr38*)]; [(Tyr38*)] |
| R | II-1 | LLS | NDUF AF3 | Assembly, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6129 11 | NM_199069.2:c.[5C>A];[489_4 90del] | NP_951032.1.p.[(Ala2Asp)]; [(Gly164Serfs*29)] |
| S | II-1 | Isola ted | NDUF AF4 | Assembly, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6117 76 | NM_014165.4:c.[224del];[413T >C] | NP_054884.1.p.[(Pro75Leufs* 7)]; [(Ile138Thr)] |
| T | II-2, II-3 | Isola ted | NDUF AF4 | Assembly, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6117 76 | NM_014165.4:c.[413T>C];[413 T>C] | NP_054884.1.p.[(Ile138Thr)]; [(Ile138Thr)] |
| U | II-1, II-2 | Isola ted | NDUF AF8 | Assembly, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6184 61 | NM_001086521.2:c.[44T>G];[4 4T>G] | NP_001079990.1.p.[(Leu15Arg)]; [(Leu15Arg)] |
| V | II-1, II-2, II-3 | Plus, Isola ted | NDUF AF8 | Assembly, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6184 61 | NM_001086521.2:c.[195+271C >T];[195+271C>T] | NP_001079990.1.p.? |
| W | II-2 | Isola ted | NDUF AF8 | Assembly, peripheral arm (Q) | AR | 6184 61 | NM_001086521.2:c.[195+271C >T];[195+271C>T] | NP_001079990.1.p.? |

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Table 2 Clinical features

| Family ID | Optic atrophy | | Other symptoms | MRI findings |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------|---|--|
| | Type of onset | AOO, years | | |
| A: II-1 | LHON-like | 16 | Upbeat nystagmus | Optic nerve atrophy, new tiny focus of T2/FLAIR signal abnormality in the left cerebral peduncle |
| B: II-2 | LHON-like | 25 | - | Optic nerve atrophy |
| C: III-1 | Insidious | 9-10 | Neurogenic bladder | N/A |
| D: II-1 | Insidious | 2-6 | - | MRI normal |
| D: II-2 | Insidious | 2-3 | - | MRI normal |
| E: II-1 | LHON-like | 10 | Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome | MRI normal |
| F: III-2 | LHON-like | 16 | - | MRI normal |
| G: II-1 | Insidious | 2-12 | Hyperintensity of MRI T2 signal of the spinal cord, Vitamin B12 deficiency | Hyperintensity of the posterior part of the cervical spinal cord |
| H: II-1 | Insidious | 2 | Pendular nystagmus, Abnormal basal ganglia MRI signal intensity, elayed ability to walk | Bilateral pallidal and dentati hyperintensity in TR sequences |
| I: II-1 | Insidious | 3 | Mild neurosensory hearing impairment | Optic nerve atrophy |
| J: II-1 | Insidious | 5 | Nystagmus, Polyneuropathy, Intellectual disability, borderline, Mild neurosensory hearing impairment, Sensory ataxia | Optic nerve atrophy, very mild atrophy of cerebellar vermis |
| K: II-1 | Insidious | 0-1 | Multiple sclerosis, Pendular nystagmus, Decreased mean corpuscular volume, CNS demyelination | Demyelinating brain lesions (images and report not available)-2021 (followed elsewhere for MS) |
| L: II-1 | Insidious | 5 | Cerebellar atrophy, abnormality of extrapyramidal motor function, cerebral cortical atrophy, generalized-onset seizure, intellectual disability, borderline, mild neurosensory hearing impairment, cognitive impairment | Cerebellar and mild cerebral cortical atrophy |
| M: II-2 | Insidious | 2-12 | - | MRI normal |
| M: II-3 | Insidious | 2-12 | - | MRI normal |
| N: II-2 | LHON-like | 15 | - | MRI normal |
| N: II-3 | LHON-like | 16 | - | MRI normal |
| O: II-1 | Insidious | 0-1 | Megaloblastic anaemia, abnormality of the gallbladder, folate deficiency | Optic nerve atrophy |
| P: II-2 | Insidious | 6-12 | Cerebral calcification, lactic acidosis, sensory axonal neuropathy, mild neurosensory hearing impairment, hyperintensity of cerebral white matter on MRI, multiple meningiomas, vitamin B ₁₂ deficiency | Brainstem white matter changes; multiple frontal and falx calcified meningiomas; optic nerve atrophy; abnormal lactic acid accumulation at MRS |
| P: II-4 | Insidious | 2-6 | Lactic acidosis, Sensory axonal neuropathy, Cerebral aneurysm, Abnormal basal ganglia MRI signal intensity | Focal left substantia nigra hyperintensity; left M1 aneurysm; optic nerve atrophy |
| Q: II-1 | LHON-like | 2-6 | Nystagmus, Peripheral axonal neuropathy | MRI normal |
| R: II-1 | Insidious | 0-3 | Motor delay, Abnormal basal ganglia MRI signal intensity | Bilateral striatal necrosis (putaminal bilateral hyperintensity) |
| S: II-1 | Insidious + LHON-like | 0-3 | - | MRI normal |
| T: II-2 | Insidious | 3 | - | Mild disproportionate volume loss involving the superior vermis and cerebellar hemispheres noticed. |
| T: II-3 | Insidious | 5 | - | Mild disproportionate volume loss involving the superior vermis and cerebellar hemispheres noticed. |
| U: II-1 | LHON-like | 10 | - | MRI normal |
| U: II-2 | LHON-like | 13 | - | MRI normal |
| V: II-1 | LHON-like | 3 | Strabismus, hyperopia, nystagmus, unsteady gait, mild developmental delay | Non-specific white matter lesions |
| V: II-2 | LHON-like | 3 | Strabismus, hyperopia | Non-specific white matter lesions |

| | | | | |
|---------|-----------|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| V: II-3 | LHON-like | 4 | Strabismus, hyperopia | Non-specific white matter lesions |
| W: II-2 | Insidious | 0-1 | - | MRI normal |

ID = Individual; OD = right eye; OS = left eye; OOA = age of onset; N/A, not available; ONH = optic nerve head.

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Table 3 Ophthalmic findings

| Family | ID | Age at last visit (years) | Fundus oculi description | VA OD | VA OS | OCT RNFL avg OD | OCT RNFL avg OS | Visual field MD OD | Visual field MD OS |
|--------|-------|---------------------------|---|-------|---------|--|-----------------|--|--------------------|
| A | II-1 | 30 | Bilateral and symmetrical optic atrophy | 0.01 | 0.01 | 56 | 55 | -27.74 | -30.84 |
| B | II-2 | 39 | Temporal optic nerve pallor | 1 | 0.6 | N/Q, diffuse thinning more pronounced in temporal quadrant | | N/A | N/A |
| C | III-1 | 25 | Bilateral OA, High myopia | 0.8 | 0.4 | 47 | 54 | -7.23 | -9.12 |
| D | II-1 | 7 | Temporal optic nerve pallor | 0.8 | 0.4 | 49 | 44 | N/A | N/A |
| D | II-2 | 5 | Temporal optic nerve pallor | 0.6 | 0.9 | 42 | 43 | N/A | N/A |
| E | II-1 | 30 | Diffuse optic atrophy | 0.05 | 0.05 | N/A | N/A | N/Q, cecocentral scotoma | |
| F | III-2 | 27 | Bilateral OA | 0.01 | 0.01 | 55 | 46 | N/A | N/A |
| G | II-1 | 20 | Diffuse optic nerve pallor more evident temporally, small ONH | 0.1 | 0.1 | 46 | 48 | -14.65 | -10.92 |
| H | II-1 | 22 | Pale optic disk temporal bilaterally | 0.4 | 0.3/0.4 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| I | II-1 | 17 | Temporal optic nerve pallor | 0.15 | 0.1 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| J | II-1 | 45 | Optic nerve pallor (OS>OD) | 0.02 | 0.02 | N/Q, inside normal values | | N/Q, central scotoma and enlargement of the blind spot | |
| K | II-1 | 37 | Diffuse optic nerve pallor | 0.1 | 0.16 | N/Q | N/Q | -14.25 | -16.6 |
| L | II-1 | 35 | N/A (uncooperative patient) | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| M | II-2 | 18 | Temporal optic nerve pallor | 0.25 | 0.16 | 65 | 64 | -2.82 ^a | -6.56 ^a |
| M | II-3 | 16 | Temporal optic nerve pallor | 0.4 | 0.5 | 58 | 56 | -3.69 ^a | -3.66 ^a |
| N | II-2 | 24 | Bilateral OA, marked loss of papillo-macular bundle | 0.01 | 0.01 | N/A | N/A | N/Q, generalized depression | |
| N | II-3 | 18 | OD severe OA, OS some preservation of nasal side | 0.01 | 0.02 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| O | II-1 | 25 | Temporal pallor | 0.32 | 0.4 | 67 | 68 | -10.2 | -8.25 |
| P | II-2 | 52 | Diffuse optic nerve pallor more evident temporally | 0.25 | 0.2 | 41 | 39 | -12.63 | -12.73 |
| P | II-4 | 37 | Diffuse optic nerve pallor more evident temporally | 0.13 | 0.1 | 43 | 37 | -16.43 | -19.41 |
| Q | II-1 | 15 | Bilateral OA | 0.16 | 0.01 | 40 | 43 | -20.54 | -11.98 |
| R | II-1 | 7 | ONH pallor | 0.5 | 0.3 | 38 | 41 | N/A | N/A |
| S | II-1 | 18 | Temporal pallor followed by diffuse pallor after recurrence | 0.2 | 0.25 | 42 | 41 | -30.08 | -32.00 |
| T | II-2 | 17 | Bilateral OA, Left Coats disease | 0.5 | 0.5 | 56 | 55 | N/A | N/A |
| T | II-3 | 13 | Bilateral OA | 1 | 1 | 68 | 58 | -6.64 | -13.05 |
| U | II-1 | 24 | N/A | 0.015 | 0.03 | 40 | 55 | N/A | N/A |
| U | II-2 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| V | II-1 | 15 | Bilateral OA, Tortuous vessels | 0.03 | 0.03 | N/Q | N/Q | -24.76 | -20.78 |
| V | II-2 | 11 | Bilateral OA, Tortuous vessels | 0.08 | 0.063 | N/Q | N/Q | -6.21 | -6.77 |
| V | II-3 | 6 | Bilateral OA, Tortuous vessels | 0.063 | 0.063 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| W | II-2 | 54 | Bilateral OA | 0.08 | 0.05 | 40 | 43 | N/A | N/A |

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ID, Individual; VA, visual acuity; OD, right eye; OS, left eye; N/A, not available; N/Q, not quantifiable; OCT, optical coherence tomography; RNFL, retinal nerve fiber layer; MD, mean deviation.
^aVisual field test with M-700, Medmont International, Vermont, Australia.

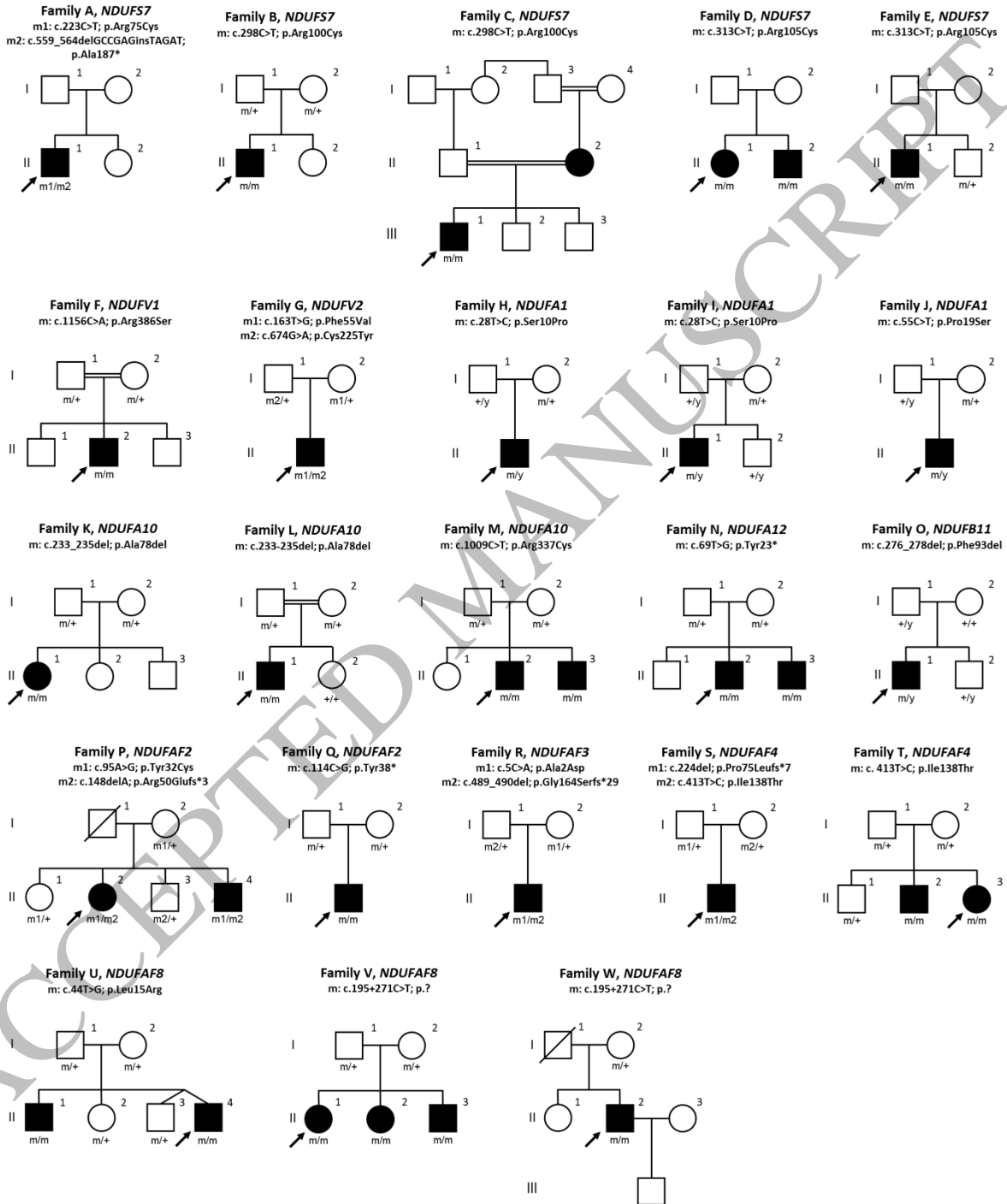


Figure 1
157x189 mm (DPI)

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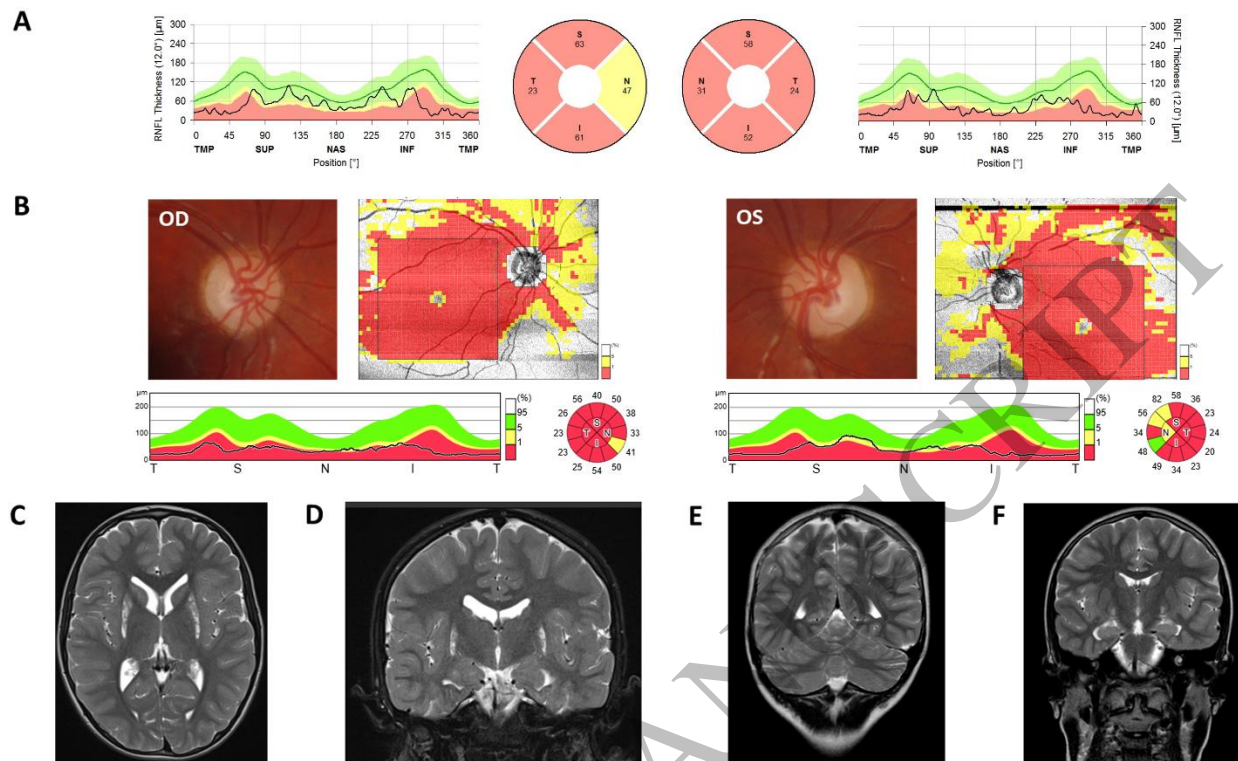


Figure 2
165x102 mm (DPI)

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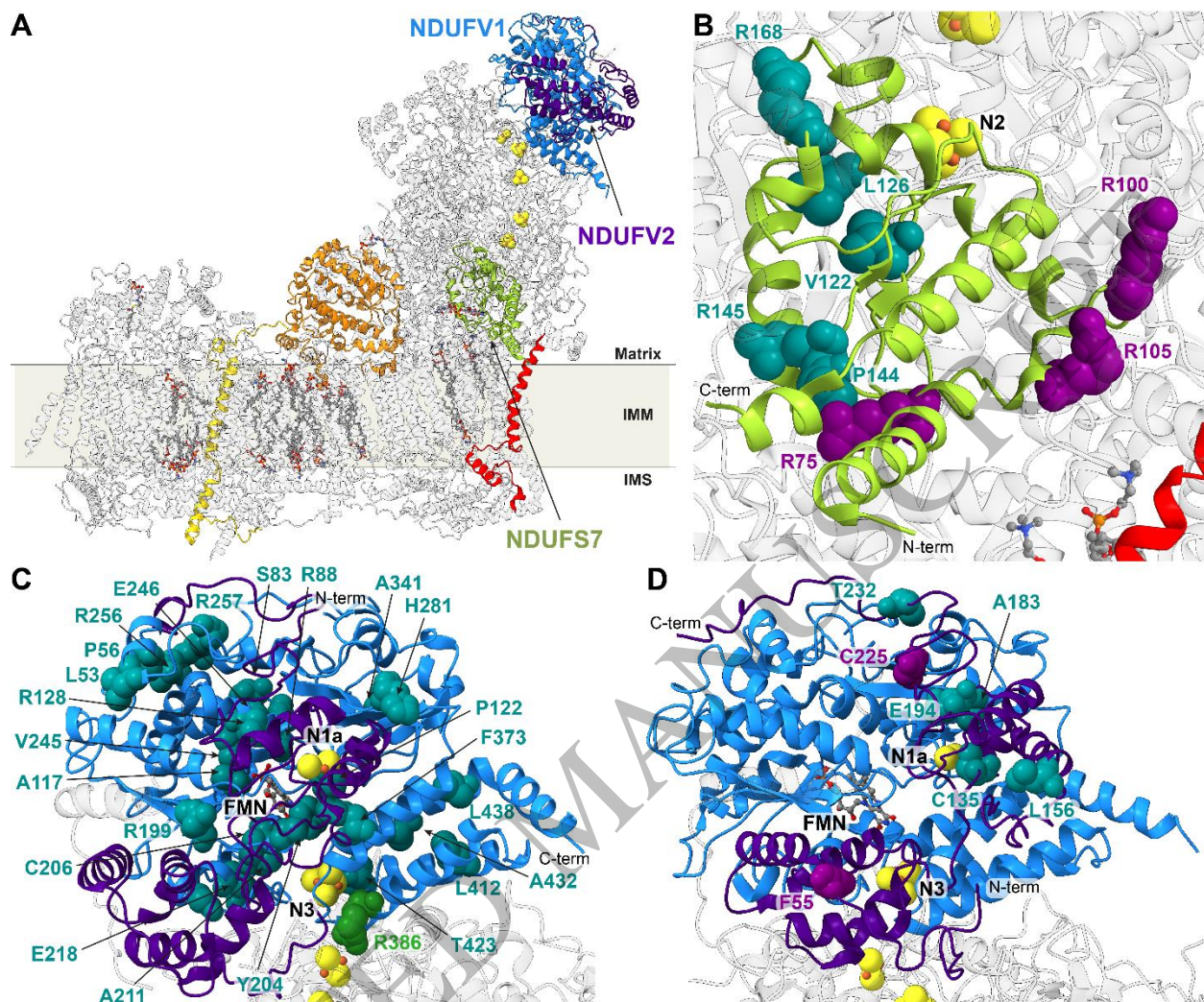


Figure 3
165x138 mm (DPI)

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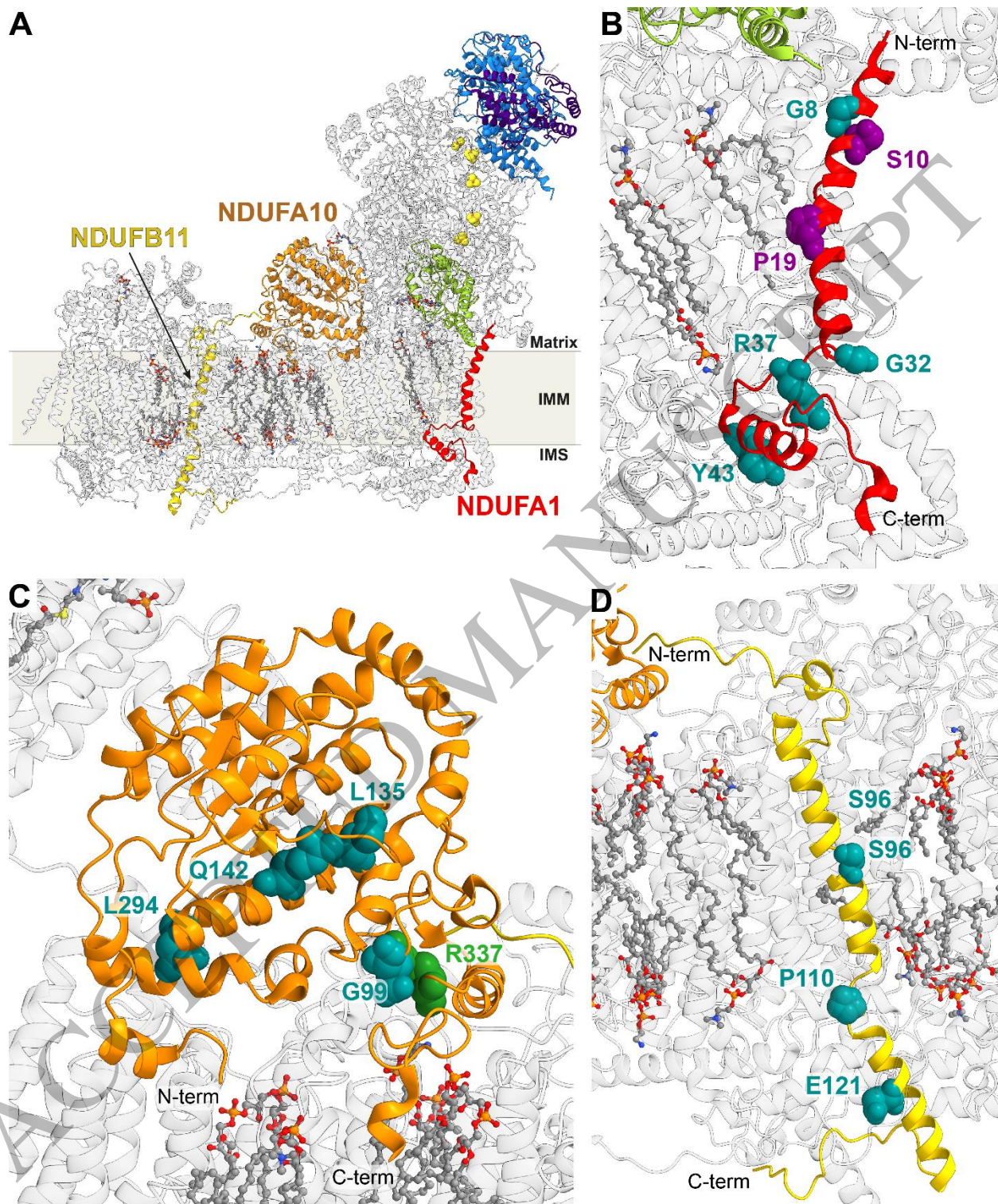


Figure 4
165x199 mm (DPI)

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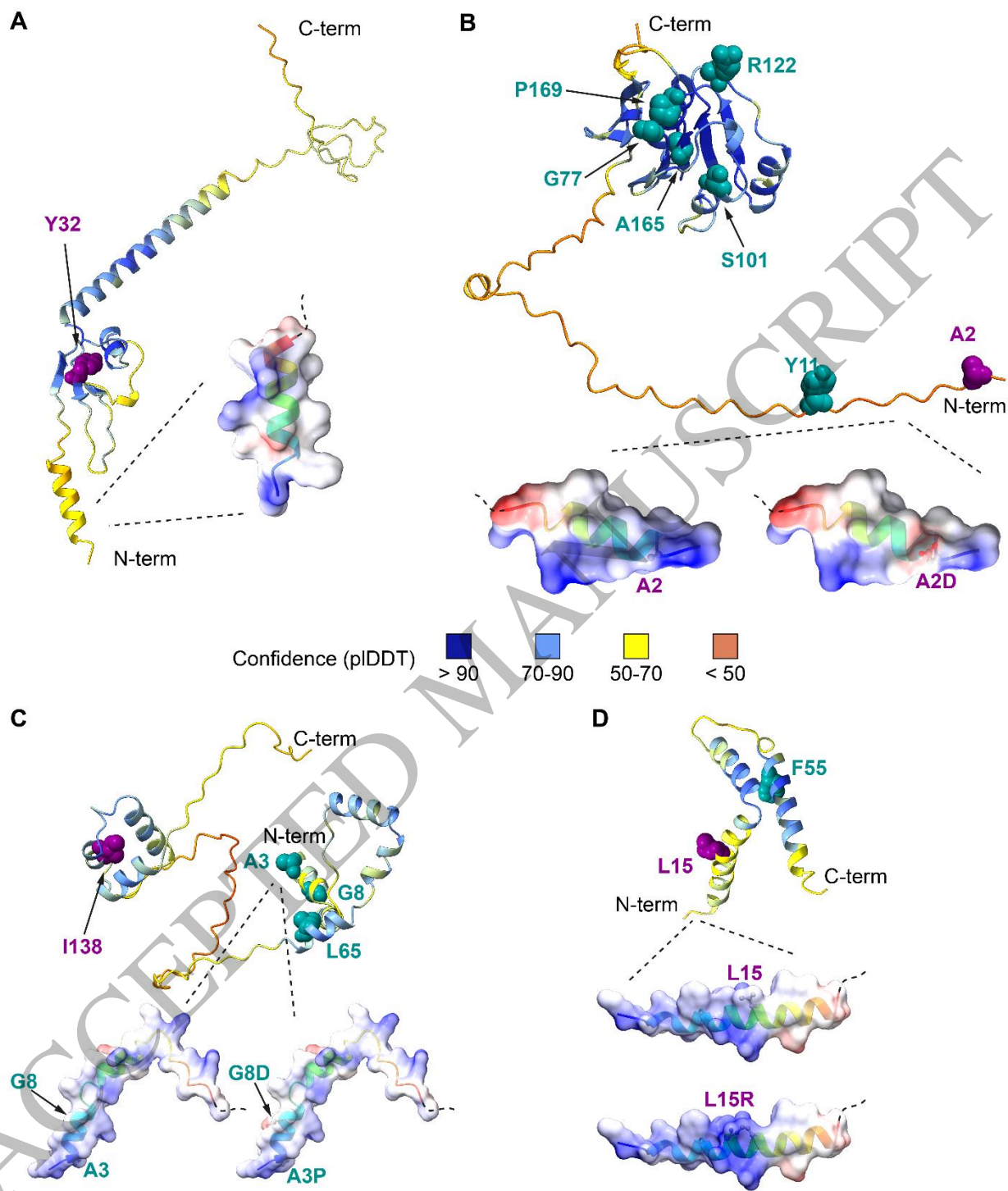


Figure 5
165x195 mm (DPI)

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