Fundamental Research

The molecular and cellular bases of neurodegenerative diseases are still poorly understood. In order to develop better therapies, scientists at DZNE investigate how nerve cells are damaged and which targets are most relevant for the development of new medicines. Most neurodegenerative diseases share the deposition of misfolded proteins. We therefore believe that unifying cellular mechanisms are characteristic for these diseases.

Fundamental research at DZNE comprises various themes, including:

**Ageing and age-related cognitive impairment**
Age remains the main risk factor for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease. However, the biological links between ageing and neurodegeneration are largely unknown.

**The synapse and its dysfunction in disease**
There is a growing consensus that early disturbances in synaptic activity between nerve cells – i.e. glitches in the connections between nerve cells – are an early and possibly entirely reversible phase. Therefore much attention is focused on mechanisms of synaptic dysfunction. We approach and its alterations in rodent models and by researching into genetic and epigenetic regulators of synaptic plasticity.

**Inflammatory responses and their possible role in neurodegeneration**
The role of inflammation in the progression of neurodegenerative diseases and non-neuronal cells. Neurodegenerative diseases might be accompanied by inflammatory processes which activate mechanisms of this immune response.

**Protein dysfunction and axo-dendritic injury**
Prior to neuronal demise, neurodegeneration is associated with protein transport processes within the nerve cells and synaptic activity. We try to understand mechanisms leading to protein damage to axo-dendritic networks.

**Disease mechanisms in disease models**
DZNE scientists work with a variety of disease models to study disease and neuroprotective mechanisms which may serve as promising therapeutic targets.
Stem cells and regenerative medicine
DZNE scientists carry out research on adult neurogenesis and use inducible mechanisms of plasticity, restoration, and compensation from extrinsic sources. We intend to apply insights from developmental neurobiology to the identification of novel treatment strategies.

Epigenetics and genome-environment interactions
While genetic factors play an important role in the aetiology of neurodegenerative disorders, their contribution critically depends on the interaction between genes and environment. Therefore, we aim to elucidate the mechanisms by which environmental factors contribute to the pathogenesis of neurodegenerative diseases.