
Bi-allelic variants in *INTS11* are associated with a complex neurological disorder

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Here we describe fifteen individuals who carry damaging bi-allelic variants in *INTS11* and who present with neurological symptoms. Modeling experiments in *Drosophila* identified two strong and five mild LoF alleles of *INTS11*. Our results provide compelling evidence that the integrity of the Integrator RNA endonuclease is critical for brain development.



Bi-allelic variants in *INTS11* are associated with a complex neurological disorder

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Summary

The Integrator complex is a multi-subunit protein complex that regulates the processing of nascent RNAs transcribed by RNA polymerase II (RNAPII), including small nuclear RNAs, enhancer RNAs, telomeric RNAs, viral RNAs, and protein-coding mRNAs. *Integrator subunit 11* (*INTS11*) is the catalytic subunit that cleaves nascent RNAs, but, to date, mutations in this subunit have not been linked to human disease. Here, we describe 15 individuals from 10 unrelated families with bi-allelic variants in *INTS11* who present with global developmental and language delay, intellectual disability, impaired motor development, and brain atrophy. Consistent with human observations, we find that the fly ortholog of *INTS11*, *dInts11*, is essential and expressed in the central nervous systems in a subset of neurons and most glia in larval and adult stages. Using *Drosophila* as a model, we investigated the effect of seven variants. We found that two (p.Arg17Leu and p.His414Tyr) fail to rescue the lethality of null mutants, indicating that they are strong loss-of-function variants. Furthermore, we found that five variants (p.Gly55Ser, p.Leu138Phe, p.Lys396Glu, p.Val517Met, and p.Ile553Glu) rescue lethality but cause a shortened lifespan and bang sensitivity and affect locomotor activity, indicating that they are partial loss-of-function variants. Altogether, our results provide compelling evidence that integrity of the Integrator RNA endonuclease is critical for brain development.

Introduction

The Integrator complex is a multi-subunit protein complex consisting of 15 subunits (IntS1-15)¹ that regulates the termination of RNA polymerase II (RNAPII)² (Figure S1). Initially, the Integrator was discovered as a complex performing 3' end processing of small nuclear RNAs, critical components of the splicing machinery.^{3,4} Later, the reper-

toire of non-coding RNAs processed by Integrator was expanded to include some enhancer RNAs,⁵ telomeric RNAs,⁶ and viral RNAs.^{7,8} Most recently, the Integrator has been found to be a broad driver of promoter-proximal termination at all RNAPII loci, including protein-coding genes.⁹⁻¹⁵ The RNA-processing activity of the Integrator complex is carried out by subunit 11 (*INTS11*), also known as Cleavage and Polyadenylation Specific Factor 3-Like

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(CPSF3L), which contains a metallo- β -lactamase and β -CASP domain that, together, coordinate two zinc ions within the active site to promote its RNA endonuclease activity.¹⁶ INTS11 also forms a heterotrimer with INTS4 and INTS9 to create what has been termed the “Integrator Cleavage Module.”^{17–21} All three subunits within the Integrator Cleavage Module were shown to be important for Integrator complex function.²²

The Integrator complex subunits are conserved throughout metazoan lineages. There is only one predicted *INTS11* ortholog in *Drosophila*, also called *IntS11*, with a DIOPT²³ score of 13/16. Previous studies of fly *IntS11* were limited to *in vitro* systems and mutant lines have not been generated to allow organismal investigations.^{3,24,25} However, genome-wide RNAi studies in *Drosophila* have shown that reducing the level of *IntS11* in neuroblasts causes a mild reduction in the number of daughter cells derived from neuroblasts in the larval brain²⁶ whereas a reduction of the expression in cardiac tissue causes a reduced lifespan.²⁷

To date, only three Integrator complex subunits have been linked to human disease. Genetic variants in *Integrator Complex Subunit 1* (*INTS1* [MIM: 611345]) and *Integrator Complex Subunit 8* (*INTS8* [MIM: 611351]) have been associated with rare autosomal-recessive human neurodevelopmental syndromes presenting with severe developmental delay (DD), intellectual disability (ID), lack of speech development, motor impairment, seizures, and similar dysmorphic features of the face and limbs^{28,29} (MIM: 618571 and 618572, respectively). Recently, *Integrator Complex Subunit 13* (*INTS13* [MIM: 615079]) variants have been associated with an autosomal-recessive ciliopathy.³⁰ These studies suggest that Integrator function is critical during human development and that the brain may be particularly sensitive to disruptions in Integrator activity.

Here, we present molecular and clinical data from 15 individuals with bi-allelic variants in the *INTS11* gene. These individuals present a neurodevelopmental phenotype due to defective neurogenesis and/or neurodegenerative processes. We generated null alleles of *IntS11* in flies and show that *IntS11* is an essential gene expressed in a subset of larval and adult CNS neurons and glia. We tested seven of the human *INTS11* variants using orthologous modeling in *Drosophila*. We found that two behaved as strong loss of function (LoF) by failing to rescue lethality, while the others lead to viable flies that exhibit defects in several neurological assays. Our findings indicate that variants in human *INTS11* result in a novel complex neurological disorder.

Material and methods

Identification of *INTS11* variants and proband phenotyping

Variants in *INTS11* were identified by whole-exome or -genome sequencing performed on whole-blood DNA from probands iden-

tified through clinical diagnostic practice or Institutional Review Board-approved research studies. Variants were prioritized based on allele frequency, inheritance, and gene-phenotype associations. Within this cohort no additional explanatory variants were identified for any individuals. Affected individuals were identified through professional communication, connections through GeneMatcher,³¹ and by searching the Undiagnosed Diseases Network (UDN) and the Deciphering Developmental Disorders (DDD) Research Study.³² Variants were reported according to standardized nomenclature defined by the reference human genome GRCh38 (hg38). All variants are reported on *INTS11* transcript GenBank: NM_001256456.1. Patient consent for participation, phenotyping, and sample collection was obtained through the referring clinical teams. Referring clinicians were requested to complete a comprehensive questionnaire that included sections related to neurodevelopmental screening, behavior, dysmorphology, muscular, cardiac, and other systemic phenotypic features.

To assess allele frequencies in control population, we utilized gnomAD. We did not find any individual in the database carrying the variants p.Gly18Ser, p.Arg23Leu, p.Phe45Ser, p.Leu144Phe, p.Lys402Glu, p.Pro413Ser, p.His420Tyr, p.Val557Aspfs*14, or p.Val557Glu. However, there are alternative variants in gnomAD at some of these residues but none are present as homozygotes: p.Gly18Gly (4.02E–06), p.Arg23Ter (1.78E–05), p.Lys402Arg (4.01E–06), p.Pro413Leu (7.13E–06), p.Arg527Cys (3.75E–05), and p.Val557Leu (9.91E–06). Some variants are present in the control population, but again none are present as homozygotes: p.Gly61Ser (7.96E–06), p.Arg223Trp (8.00E–06), p.Glu224Gly (4.00E–06), p.Arg225Gln (1.42E–05), p.Ala319fs*2 (8.17E–05), p.Val521Met (2.13E–05), p.Arg527fs*44 (1.93E–05), and p.Tyr584Cys (5.26E–06). For some of these residues, there are also alternative variants, none present as homozygotes: p.Gly61Gly (7.08E–06), p.Gly61Asp (3.98E–06), p.Arg223Arg (3.19E–5), p.Arg223Gln (4.00E–6), p.Glu224Glu (4.00E–6), p.Glu224Lys (4.00E–6), p.Ala319Ala (4.80E–5), p.Val521Val (6.38E–6), and p.Arg527Cys (3.75E–5). Allele frequencies are reported in Figure S5.

Fly strains and genetics

All fly strains used in this study were generated in-house or obtained from the Bloomington *Drosophila* Stock Center (BDSC) or Vienna *Drosophila* Resource Center (VDRC) and cultured at room temperature unless otherwise noted. The *IntS11*^{KozakGal4} allele was generated using the CRIMIC (CRISPR-Mediated Integration Cassette) technique as described.³³ We determined mutant phenotype of *dIntS11* by crossing *IntS11*^{KozakGal4} allele to a genomic deficiency (*Df*) (*w*[1118]; *Df*(3R)*Exel9025/TM6B, Tb[1]*) (BDSC #7995). The recessive lethality associated with the *IntS11*^{KozakGal4} allele was rescued with an 120 kb P[acman] duplication (*Dp*)(*w*[1118];*Dp*(3;2)*GV-CH321-23I13,PBac[y[+mDint2]w[+mC]=GV-CH321-23I13]VK00037/CyO*) (BDRC #90212).³⁴ We determined the cell-type specific expression pattern of *IntS11* by crossing *IntS11*^{KozakGal4} to *UAS-mCherry.NLS* (*w*[*]; *P*[*w*[+mC]=*UAS-mCherry.NLS*]*3*) (BDSC #38424).

The *IntS11* RNAi (RNA interference) lines (*P*[*GD9692*]v33450 and *P*[*KK100724*]VIE-260B) were obtained from VDRC. *da-Gal4* (*w*[*]; *P*[*w*[+mW.hs]=*GAL4-da.G32/UH1, Sb[1]/TM6B, Tb[1]*] (BDSC #55851), *Act-GAL4/CyO* (*y*[1] *w*[*]; *P*[*w*[+mC]=*Act5C-GAL4*]*25FO1/CyO, y*[+]) (BDSC #4414), *elav-Gal4* (*P*[*w*[+mC]=*GAL4-elav.L*]*2/CyO*) (BDSC #8765) and *repo-GAL4* (*w*[1118]; *P*[*w*[+m*]=*GAL4*]*repo/TM3, Sb[1]*) (BDSC #7415) were obtained from Bloomington *Drosophila* Stock Center (BDSC).

Cloning and transgenesis

All transgenic constructs were generated by Gateway (Thermo Fisher Scientific) cloning into the pGW-attB-3xHA plasmid.³⁵ The human *INTS11* cDNA clone was obtained from BCM human cDNA collection (GenBank: NM_017871.6 transcript). Fly *Ints11* cDNA was generated from total cDNA prepared from adult heads from γ [*]w[*] animals. Flanking Gateway attB sites were added to the primer used to amplify the *Ints11* coding sequence by PCR and then shuttled to the pDONR223 by BP clonase II (Thermo Fisher Scientific). Variants were generated by Q5 site-directed mutagenesis (NEB), fully sequenced (Sanger), and finally cloned into pGW-attB-3xHA plasmid via LR clonase II (Thermo Fisher Scientific). All expression constructs were inserted into the VK37 (*PBac[y[+]-attP]VK00037*) docking site by ϕ C31-mediated transgenesis.³⁶

Fly modeling studies were initiated with families 1–6 and 10. Due to technical problems with generating reagents for the missense variants found in family 1 (p.Phe45Ser) and family 5 (p.Glu224Gly), fly modeling was performed only for the missense variants found in families 2, 3, 4, 6, and 10, a total of 7 variants: p.Arg23Leu, p.Gly61Ser, p.Leu144Phe, p.Lys402Glu, p.His420Tyr, p.Val521Met, and p.Val557Glu. Families 7–9 were recruited later into the study and these variants were not modeled.

Drosophila behavioral assays

For the bang sensitivity assay,³⁷ flies were not anesthetized with CO₂ for 24 h before being tested. At the time of testing, flies were transferred to a clean vial without food and vortexed for 15 s at maximum speed. The time to recover to freely moving status (without abnormal falling or flipping) was measured for each fly. The climbing assay³⁸ was performed similarly. Flies were tapped to the bottom of the vial three times and examined for a negative geotaxis (climbing) response to reach the 2.5 cm and 5 cm mark on the vial. Flies were given a maximum of 60 s to pass the mark. Climbing speed is calculated by dividing the distance (2.5 cm or 5 cm) by the time point the fly passes the mark, and average speeds are calculated by taking the mean of the two values. Flies that did not pass the mark were considered to have a climbing speed of zero.

For survival rate, the surviving adult flies were counted within 1–3 days of eclosion, and expected numbers were calculated based on Mendelian ratios. For lifespan, 1- to 3-day-old eclosed flies were separated and maintained at 25°C, and survival was determined every 2–3 days.

Immunohistochemistry

L3 larval CNS and adult brains were dissected and fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde (PFA) (diluted with 1×PBS from 16% paraformaldehyde solution, EM grade; Electron microscopy sciences Cat:15710) at room temperature for 20 min and washed in PBS containing 0.3% Triton X-100. The primary antibodies were used at the following dilutions: anti-Elav (Embryonic lethal abnormal vision) rat monoclonal: 7E8A10(DSHB), 1:200; anti-Repo (mouse monoclonal: 8D12(DSHB), 1:50 and incubated at 4°C overnight. After washing (4 times), samples were incubated with the secondary antibody conjugated to Alexa 647 (Jackson ImmunoResearch) diluted 1:500 in PBS containing 0.3% Triton X-100 and incubated at room temperature for 2 h. After washing (4 times), samples were mounted in RapiClear (SunJin Lab Co.) and imaged with confocal microscopy.

Results

Individuals with variants in *INTS11* exhibit neurological phenotypes

A cohort of 15 individuals from 10 families presented with a neurodevelopmental disorder and harbored either homozygous or compound heterozygous variants in *INTS11* based on exome or whole-genome sequencing (ES and WS, respectively). In total, 19 unique variants were identified: 14 are missense, 2 are intronic variants predicted to impact splicing, 2 are frameshifts resulting in a premature stop codon, and 1 is a nonsense variant (Table 1). The variants span the entire gene and are not clustered (Figure 1A). All variants have Combined Annotation Dependent Depletion (CADD) score^{39–41} of higher than 20, and most are predicted to be damaging based on Sorting Intolerant From Tolerant (SIFT) and Polymorphism Phenotyping (PolyPhen)⁴² (Figure 1B).

Subjects with bi-allelic variants in *INTS11* coding sequence showed a consistent neurological phenotype. Phenotypic findings are summarized in Table 1, and detailed clinical information for individual families is included in the supplemental information. The cohort consists of 13 females and 2 males, ranging in age from 2 to 18 years. The cohort also includes 5 subjects who died at the ages of 6, 13, and 18 years due to worsening of their clinical conditions. Global DD, ID, motor and speech impairment (delayed or absent), and brain imaging abnormalities were documented in all individuals for whom data were available (14/14). Specifically, MRI brain changes revealed progressive cortical atrophy, cortical gyral simplification, and delayed myelination affecting cerebrum and cerebellum. Delayed gross motor development (12/15) and generalized hypotonia (11/14) were also commonly observed. EEG abnormalities were documented in 6 individuals (6/15), some of whom presented with epilepsy and seizures, which were refractory to antiepileptic drugs (AED) in subject 1 and subject 2. Optic atrophy was documented in 5 subjects (5/14) and visual impairment in 10 (10/14). No hearing loss was documented in the individuals of the cohort. Prenatal and postnatal growth parameters were found to be reduced in several cases (7/11) and certain craniofacial dysmorphisms, including microcephaly, abnormality of cranium shape (i.e., triangular shape and dolichocephaly), hypertelorism, epicanthic fold, narrow chin, flat nasal bridge, cleft of the lip and palate, macroglossia, and retrognathia were also recognized in the affected individuals (11/15). Nonspecific skeletal defects including premature closure of fontanelles, shortened long bones, vertebral flattening, scoliosis, and joint hyperlaxity were documented in some subjects (7/13). Internal organ malformations including heart septal defect and genitourinary anomalies (chronic glomerulopathy) were sporadically identified (Tables 1 and S1).

To gather information about human *INTS11* and its orthologous genes in genetic model organisms, we performed an *in silico* search using MARRVEL (Model organism Aggregated Resources for Rare Variant ExpLoration).⁴⁴

Table 1. Variants in *INTS11* are associated with shared clinical features

	Family 1		Family 2		Family 3	Family 4		Family 5	Family 6		Family 7	Family 8		Family 9	Family 10	
	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5	Subject 6	Subject 7	Subject 8	Subject 9	Subject 10	Subject 11	Subject 12	Subject 13	Subject 14	Subject 15	
Sex	female	female	female	female	female	female	female	female	female	male	male	female	female	female	female	female
Age	18 years (deceased)	6 years (deceased)	5 years	5 years	8 years	6 years	3 years	16 years	2 years	18 years	17 years	10 years	deceased	13years (deceased)	deceased	
Paternal variant	p.Phe45Ser	p.Phe45Ser	p.His420Tyr	p.His420Tyr	p.Val557 Aspfs*14	p.Gly61Ser	p.Glu224Gly	p.Lys402Glu	p.Arg225Gln	p.Pro413Ser	p.Pro413Ser	p.Arg223Trp	p.Arg23Leu	p.Arg23Leu	p.Arg23Leu	
Maternal variant	p.Arg527fs*44	p.Arg527fs*44	p.Leu144Phe	p.Leu144Phe	p.Val557Glu	p.Val521Met	c.1482+3G>C	c.1313-9G>A	p.Ala319fs	p.Gly18Ser	p.Gly18Ser	p.Tyr584Cys	p.Arg23Leu	p.Arg23Leu	p.Arg23Leu	
Global developmental delay	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	
Intellectual disability	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	
Language delay	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+	+++	++	+++	++	++	++	+++	+++	+++	
Motor development and disorders	+++	+++	+	+	+	++	+++	++	+++	+	+	++	+++	+++	+++	
Brain MRI	progressive cerebral atrophy, gyral simplification, pontocerebellar atrophy	progressive cerebral atrophy, gyral simplification, pontocerebellar atrophy	cerebellar hypoplasia, abnormal appearance of the posterior fossa	N/A	mild to moderate cerebellar atrophy	subtle peripheral white matter hyperintensity around the occipital horns and to a lesser extent in the frontal regions	simplified gyral pattern with agenesis of the corpus callosum and enlarged ventricles	cerebellar progressive hypoplasia	progressive supratentorial and infratentorial atrophy, leukoencephalopathy	(at age 2 years) small cerebellum; delayed myelination	(at age 9 years) progressive cerebellar atrophy; milder pontine volume loss; diffuse white matter signal changes	cerebellar atrophy	mild brain atrophy	mildly dilated 4th ventricle and suspected mild atrophy of the cerebellum	periventricular signal hyperintensity and was interpreted as suspected delayed myelination	
Hypotonia	yes	yes	yes	yes	N/A	N/A	-	-	yes	yes	yes	-	yes	yes	yes	
Seizures	yes	yes	-	-	-	-	yes	-	yes	-	one	-	-	-	-	
Microcephaly	yes	yes	-	-	-	-	yes	yes	yes	yes	-	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Optic findings	optic atrophy	optic atrophy	strabismus, myopia	myopia	mild optic atrophy	-	N/A	-	optic atrophy	retinal dystrophy	retinal dystrophy; also hypermetropia	astigmatism	-	-	optic atrophy	
Prenatal findings	IUGR	IUGR	monozygotic twin	monozygotic twin	-	-	unknown	IUGR	HELLP syndrome	gestational diabetes, mild IUGR	gestational diabetes, premature (33 w)	IUGR	-	microcephaly	-	
Facial dysmorphisms	-	-	hypertelorism, triangular face	hypertelorism, triangular face	-	-	fontanelles closed at birth, low set ears	narrow palate, retrognathism, prominent incisors, coarse facies	prominent glabella, receding forehead	-	-	short forehead, epicanthic fold, bifid uvula	coarse face, broad nose and flat nasal bridge, thin upper lip, and wide mouth with macroglossia	coarse facial features, broad nose, large mouth	coarse face, broad nose and flat nasal bridge,	

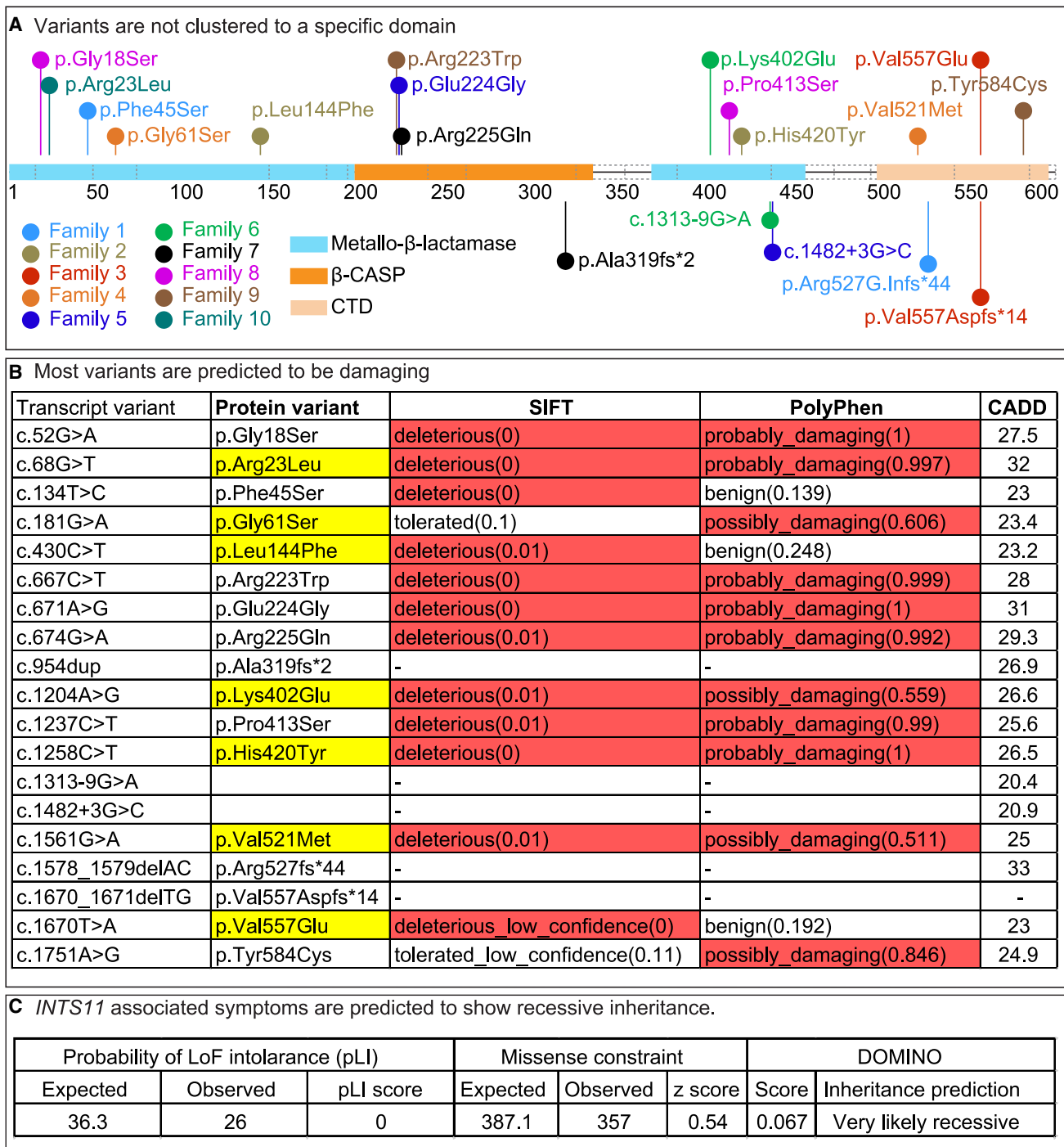


Figure 1. Most variants in *INTS11* are predicted to be deleterious

(A) Domain structure of human *INTS11* protein. *INTS11* is 606 amino acid (aa) long and contains three domains: metallo- β -lactamase (light blue), β -CASP (orange), and C-terminal domain (CTD) (tan). Variants identified in this study are indicated above/below the protein as dots and are not clustered in a specific domain.

(B) Table summarizing the nature of the variants and their predicted consequence on protein function. Coding changes are described using the GenBank: NM_001256456.1 transcript. Variants modeled in this study are highlighted in yellow. Variants predicted to be damaging based on SIFT or PolyPhen are highlighted in red (SIFT, Sorting Intolerant From Tolerant; PolyPhen, Polymorphism Phenotyping; CADD, Combined Annotation Dependent Depletion).

(C) *INTS11* is predicted to cause a recessive disease. *INTS11* is not constrained based on the presence of LoF variants in gnomAD,⁴³ resulting in a low probability-of-LoF-intolerance (pLI) score and missense constraint Z score. Based on gnomAD data and the DOMINO algorithm, variants in *INTS11* are likely to cause a recessively inherited disease.

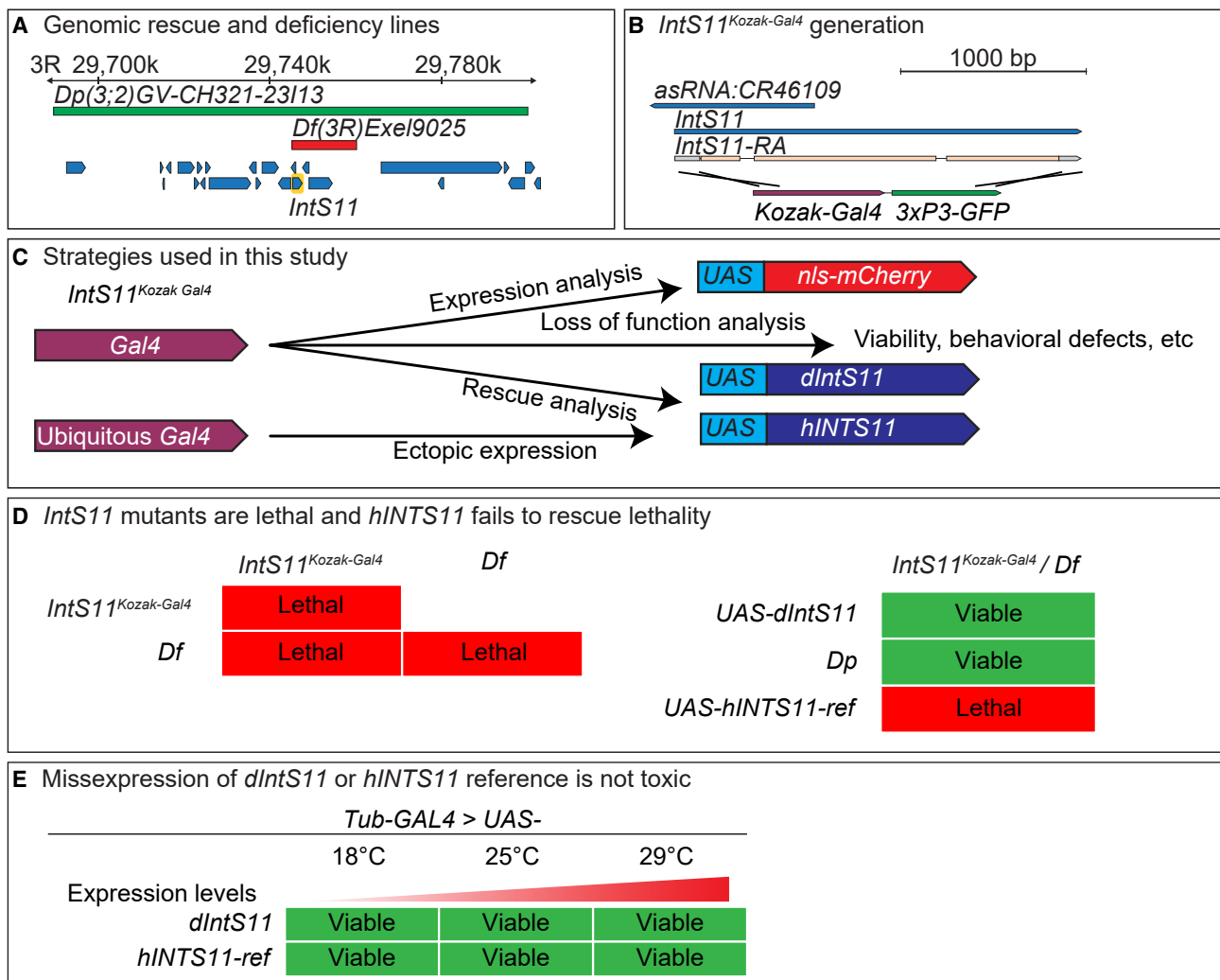


Figure 2. Loss-of-function mutations in *IntS11* in flies cause lethality

(A) Genomic location of the genomic duplication (Dp) was used to rescue *IntS11* mutants, and deficiency construct (Df) was used to uncover the gene for complementation analysis.

(B) Strategy to generate the *Kozak-Gal4* insertion in *dIntS11* locus. Using CRISPR-Cas9-mediated genome editing, we inserted the *Kozak-Gal4* cassette into the *IntS11* locus while removing the entire coding region of the gene.

(C) Strategy to study the effects of variant *IntS11* in flies. Combining *IntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4} with *UAS-mCherry.NLS* allows the determination of the expression pattern. The *Kozak-Gal4* insertion also generates a null allele to investigate mutant phenotypes and to perform rescue assays using *UAS-dIntS11* or *UAS-hINTS11*. We also ectopically express *dIntS11* or *hINTS11* reference (Ref) using a ubiquitous GAL4 driver to assess the toxicity of overexpression *in vivo*.

(D) The homozygous *IntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4} flies are lethal over a genomic deficiency covering the *dIntS11* locus. Reintroduction of *dIntS11* with a Dp construct or *Kozak-Gal4*-driven overexpression of *dIntS11* rescues the lethality phenotype of *IntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4}/*Df* flies, while overexpression of human reference cDNA does not rescue the lethality.

(E) Overexpression of *UAS-dIntS11* or *UAS-hINTS11* does not cause any change in viability. Three different temperatures are used to control the level of overexpression. The expression level of the UAS construct is lowest at 18°C, highest at 29°C, and intermediate at 25°C.

Based on gnomAD,⁴³ *INTS11* is predicted to be tolerant to LoF with a pLI score⁴⁵ of 0 with an observed/expected (o/e) ratio of 0.72. However, we did not find any individuals in gnomAD with a homozygous LoF variant. In addition, *INTS11* is not constrained to missense variation with a Z score of 0.54 and an o/e ratio of 0.92 (Figure 1C).

Loss of function of *IntS11* causes lethality in flies

To study the functional consequence of the variants observed in patients, we utilized *Drosophila melanogaster* as a model organism.⁴⁶ *INTS11* is evolutionarily conserved

across metazoans and has been confirmed to function similarly in fly cells as in humans.^{9,10,22} Human *INTS11* and fly *IntS11* proteins are highly conserved with a DIOPT (DRSC Integrative Ortholog Prediction Tool) score of 13/16 and exhibit a high similarity (81%) and identity (69%) (Figure S4). In flies, *IntS11* has been studied only in large-scale RNAi knockdown studies and *in vitro* cell culture models, and no mutant alleles are available. Using the CRIMIC (CRISPR-Mediated Integration Cassette) technique, we replaced the entire coding region of the fly *IntS11* gene with the *Kozak-Gal4* transcriptional activator (*IntS11*^{KozakGal4}) (Figure 2B).

Specifically, using two guide RNAs targeting 5' and 3' UTR of the fly gene, the entire coding region was deleted and replaced with *GAL4* using a homology donor plasmid containing the Kozak sequence followed by *GAL4* with a dominant marker (*3xP3-GFP*) flanked by 200 bp of homology to the cut sites.³³ This strategy generates a complete deletion of *IntS11* and simultaneously allows for the expression of the *GAL4* transcription factor with the same spatiotemporal pattern of *IntS11*.^{47–49} We used the *IntS11*^{KozakGal4} allele to assess the *IntS11* LoF phenotype, to rescue associated phenotypes with human or fly cDNAs, and to investigate the expression profile of the fly *IntS11* gene (Figure 2C).

The *IntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4} allele causes lethality when homozygous or over a deficiency covering the region containing the *IntS11* gene (*Df(3R) Exel9025*).⁵⁰ Mutant flies show developmental delay and live for 5 or 6 days but die as L2 larvae. Lethality can be rescued by 120 kb P[acman] genomic BAC rescue (GR) construct (*Dp (3;2) GV-CH321-23I13*)³⁶ or by driving expression of the fly *UAS-IntS11* cDNA with *IntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4} (Figure 2D). These data demonstrate that fly *IntS11* is an essential gene and that the lethality of *IntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4}/*Df(3R) Exel9025* is indeed due to the specific loss of *IntS11*.

Fly *IntS11* is enriched in neurons and glia in the nervous system

To assess the expression pattern of fly *IntS11*, we crossed the *IntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4} allele to *UAS-mCherry-NLS* to label the nuclei of the cells that express *IntS11*. As shown in Figure 3A, *IntS11* is expressed sparsely in the larval and adult CNS. In both stages, *IntS11* expression co-localizes with a subset of *Elav* (pan-neuronal nuclear marker)-positive and *Repo* (pan-glial nuclear marker)-positive cells (Figure 3B).

Loss of fly *IntS11* in glia is lethal

Given that the individuals in Table 1 exhibit neurological phenotypes, we knocked down *IntS11* in either neurons or glia. We used two distinct RNAi lines that differed in the region of the *IntS11* mRNA targeted by the dsRNA and drove their expression using the weak, ubiquitous *Gal4* driver (*Da-Gal4*) to assess knockdown efficiency. RT-qPCR analysis of *IntS11* transcripts of 2nd instar larvae (*Da-Gal4*>*UAS-RNAi IntS11*) showed ~80% reduction in expression in either RNAi line (Figure 4A). We also expressed both RNAis using a stronger ubiquitous driver (*Act-Gal4*) but did not observe any adult flies, further demonstrating the essential nature of *IntS11*. Surprisingly, a neuronal-specific *Gal4* driver (*elav-Gal4*) did not cause any obvious phenotype with either RNAi line (Figure 4C); however, the glial (*repo-Gal4*) driver caused a significant reduction in the number of eclosed flies (Figures 4B and 4C). Moreover, eclosing adult flies with *IntS11* glial knockdown display a short lifespan and reduced climbing speed at 10 days post-eclosion (Figures 4D and 4E). These data indicate that fly *IntS11* has an important function in the glia of the fly CNS.

IntS11-pArg17Leu and *pHis414Tyr* are severe loss-of-function mutations

Although human *INTS11* and fly *IntS11* share significant amino acid sequence similarity, expression of human *INTS11* using the *Kozak-GAL4* > *UAS-hINTS11* flies did not rescue the lethality associated with the *IntS11*-null mutants (Figure 2D). Overexpression of *hINTS11* using a ubiquitous driver (*Tub-GAL4*) does not affect viability or cause any obvious phenotype (Figure 2E). These data indicate that *hINTS11* cannot functionally replace fly *IntS11* and that it does not cause a dominant effect when mis-/over-expressed. Hence, we decided to study the functional consequence of the variants by generating the corresponding mutations in the fly cDNA (Figure 5A).

We assessed the following seven human *INTS11* variants: p.Arg23Leu, p.Gly61Ser, p.Leu144Phe, p.Lys402Glu, p.His420Tyr, p.Val521Met, and p.Val557Glu (Figure 5A), corresponding to the fly *IntS11* changes: p.Arg17Leu, p.Gly55Ser, p.Leu138Phe, p.Lys396Glu, p.His414Tyr, p.Val517Met, and p.Ile553Glu. Five variants rescue the lethality, while the fly p.Arg17Leu and p.His414Tyr variants did not, suggesting that these two are strong LoF variants (Figure 5A). We then assessed the lifespan of the flies rescued with the variant proteins. Flies expressing the p.Gly55Ser, p.Leu138Phe, p.Lys396Glu, p.Val517Met, and p.Ile553Glu variants in the *Kozak-GAL4* mutant background showed mild but significant reductions in lifespan (Figure 5B). Since most variants rescue lethality and cause a mild but significant lifespan reduction, we assumed they are weak LoF alleles.

Reducing the expression of patient variants reveals more diverse phenotypes

Flies rescued with missense variants express variant proteins driven by the *GAL4-UAS* binary expression system. This approach leads to much higher expression levels than typically observed for the endogenous gene expression and may therefore obscure the ability to detect mild reductions in function.^{47,51} To address this concern, we reduced the expression levels of the *IntS11* variant proteins by introducing *GAL80^{ts}*, a temperature-sensitive inhibitor of *GAL4*.^{52–54} *GAL80^{ts}* binds and inhibits the transcriptional activation domain (AD) of the *GAL4* at 18°C but is degraded at 29°C, thus allowing the *GAL4-UAS* expression system to function (Figure 6A). Intermediate temperatures allow modulation of expression levels driven by the *Kozak-GAL4* insertion and hence allow a more careful assessment of phenotypic rescue. We tested the ability of wild-type *IntS11* to rescue phenotypes at three different temperatures: 22°C, 25°C, and 29°C. At 22°C, we did not observe any adult flies with the WT *UAS-IntS11* construct, indicating that *IntS11* expression levels at this temperature are insufficient (Figure 6B). However, at 25°C and 29°C, we observe rescue with the wild-type *IntS11* (Figure 6B). Likewise, all five variants (p.Gly55Ser, p.Leu138Phe, p.Lys396Glu, p.Val517Met, and p.Ile553Glu) rescued lethality at 25°C.

All human variants in *INTS11* are associated with severe neurological symptoms such as ID, language delay, and

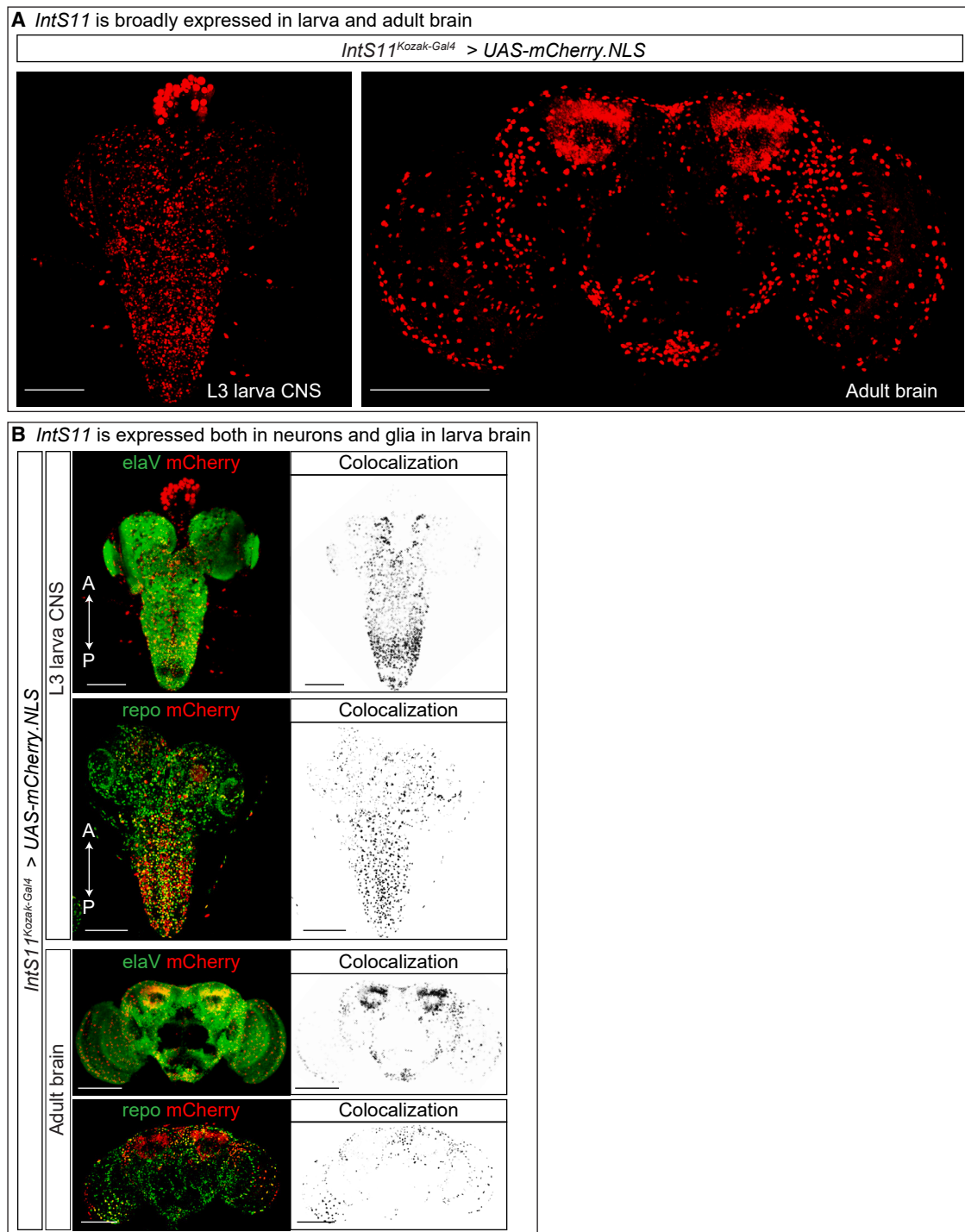


Figure 3. *dIntS11* is expressed in neurons and glia in the CNS

(A) The expression pattern of *dIntS11* in the L3 larval CNS (left) and adult brain (right) is visualized by *dIntS11^{Kozak-Gal4}*-driven expression of *mCherry.NLS*. Scale bars: 100 μ m.

(B) L3 larval CNS (top two panels) and adult brain (bottom two panels) samples expressing *dIntS11^{Kozak-Gal4}*-driven *mCherry.NLS* are co-stained with markers for neurons (Elav) or glia (Repo). Colocalization images generated using IMARIS indicate that mCherry is colocalized with both neurons (Elav) or glia (Repo). Scale bars: 100 μ m.

motor development defects, and many individuals are non-ambulatory and have seizures. To assess analogous behaviors in flies, we performed a bang-sensitivity assay to determine whether the Kozak-GAL4 flies rescued with variant fly *IntS11* are seizure prone.³⁷ This assay relies on

the mechanical stimulation of flies by vortexing them for 15 s. Flies with defects in brain function display paralysis or seizure-like symptoms after vortexing. The time they take to recover is used to measure the disruption level. Flies rescued with wild-type *IntS11* recover within a few seconds

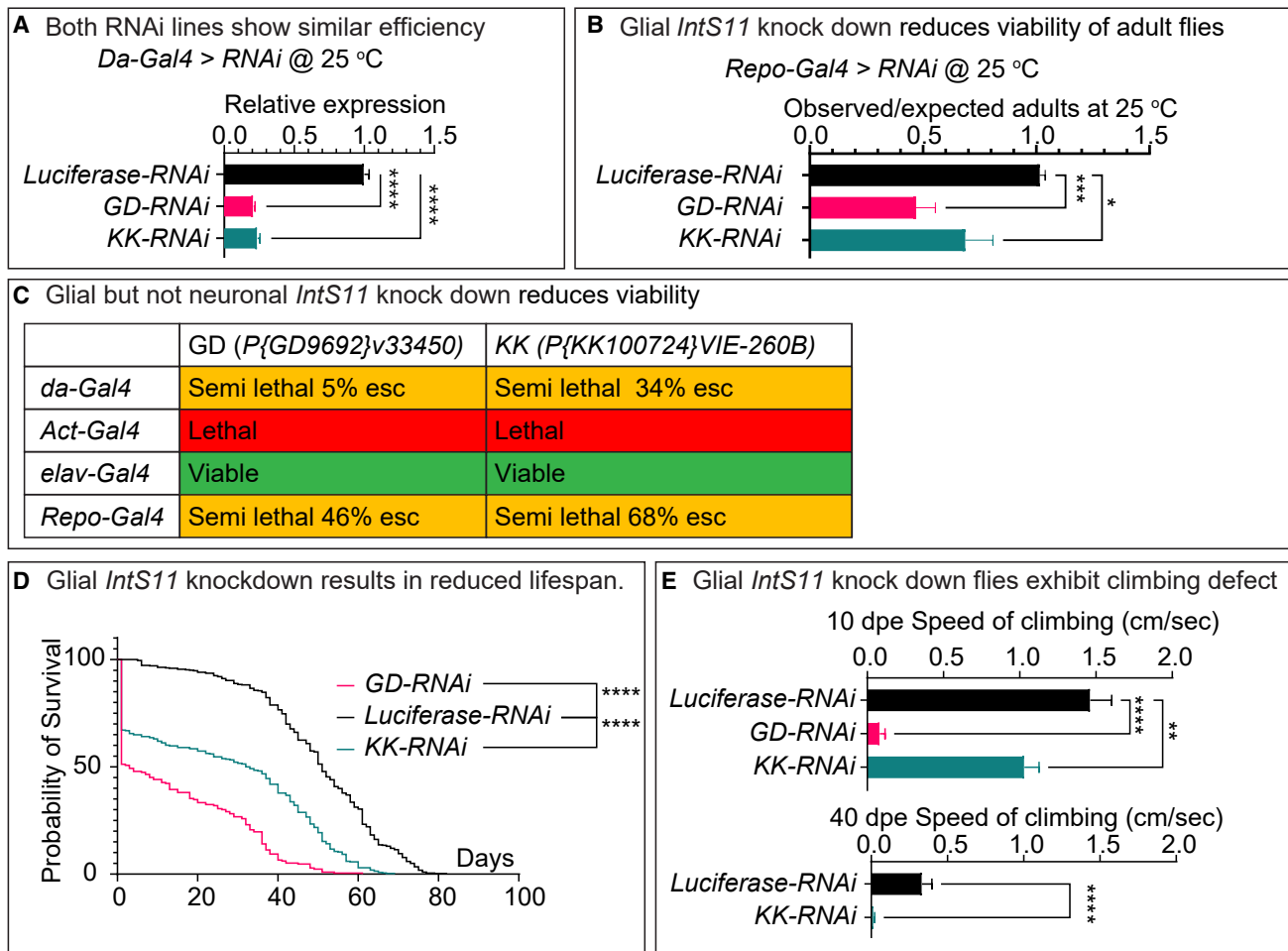


Figure 4. Glial *IntS11* knockdown reduces viability, and escapers have a short lifespan with climbing defects

(A) Real-time RT-PCR data show that two different RNAis (GD and KK) driven by a weak ubiquitous driver (*Da-Gal4*) reduce *dIntS11* mRNA levels to about 20% of the endogenous levels in control animals at 25°C. Data are means +SEM. Unpaired test (*****p* < 0.0001). (B) Glial knockdown of *dIntS11* with both GD- and KK-RNAi reduces the viability of adult flies, as shown by lower-than-expected genotypic survival ratios into adulthood. *Repo-Gal4*>*UAS-GD-RNAi* or *UAS-KK-RNAi* flies were compared to *Repo-Gal4*>*UAS-Luciferase-RNAi* (control) flies. Data are means + SEM. Unpaired test (**p* < 0.05, *****p* < 0.0001). (C) Summary of lethality phenotype of *IntS11* knockdown using various Gal4 drivers. Both GD- and KK-RNAi lines reduce viability when driven by a weak ubiquitous driver (*Da-Gal4*), and no viable flies were observed when driven by a strong ubiquitous driver (*Act-Gal4*). Pan-neuronal knockdown of *IntS11* with *elav-Gal4*-driven RNAis did not cause any apparent phenotypes, while *repo-Gal4*-driven glial knockdown was semi-lethal for both RNAi lines. (D) The lifespan of glial *IntS11* knockdown flies. Data are the probability of survival at different ages. Log rank (Mantel-Cox) test (*****p* < 0.0001). (E) Climbing speed for glial *IntS11* knock down flies at 10- and 40-day post eclosion. Data are means +SEM. Unpaired test (***p* < 0.01, *****p* < 0.0001).

with no sign of seizures. However, flies rescued with pGly55Ser, pLeu138Phe, and pIle553Glu variants are paralyzed, uncoordinated, and exhibit a seizure-like phenotype for a significantly longer period at 30 days post eclosion (Figure 6C). Flies rescued with other variants (*p.Lys396Glu* and *p.Val517Met*) also displayed longer recovery times, but the data are not statistically significant.

Next, we investigated locomotor defects by performing a *Drosophila* Activity Monitoring (DAM) assay⁵⁵ of adult flies rescued with the variant *IntS11* at 25°C. First, we monitored their activity for five days with 12-h light and 12-h dark cycle. Flies rescued with p.Val517Met and p.Ile553Glu variants displayed reduced locomotor activity throughout the day

(Figure 6D). Next, we exposed them to five days of constant darkness, and four variants (p.Gly55Ser, p.Leu138Phe, p.Val517Met, and p.Ile553Glu) displayed lower locomotor activity (Figure 6D). Hence, all but the p.Lys396Glu variant (p.Lys402Glu in human INTS11) cause reduced locomotion.

Discussion

INTS11 is considered a critical subunit of Integrator as it houses the RNA endonuclease activity, but *INTS11* variants have not previously been associated with human disease. Here we describe a cohort of 15 individuals with bi-allelic variants in *INTS11* that cause a neurodevelopmental disorder

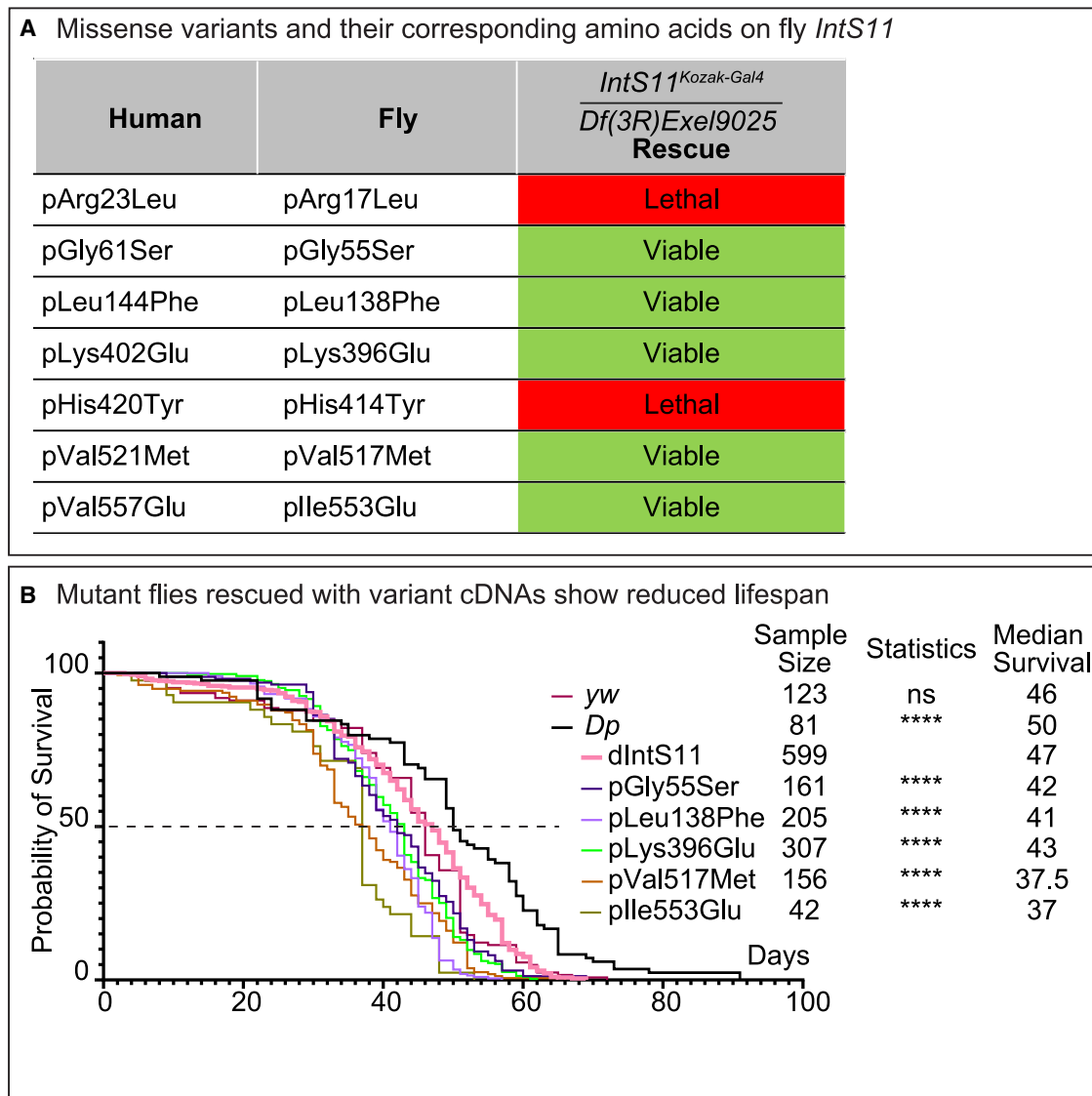


Figure 5. Two of the variants are strong loss-of-function alleles and five of the variants are weak loss-of-function alleles
 (A) Summary of missense variants, their fly counterparts, and their effect on the lethality phenotype of *dIntS11*^{Kozak-Gal4}. *pArg17Leu* and *pHis414Tyr* variants do not rescue lethality, arguing that they are strong loss-of-function alleles.
 (B) The lifespan of flies rescued with wild-type or variant cDNA. Data are the probability of survival at different ages. Log rank (Mantel-Cox) test (*****p* < 0.0001).

characterized by DD, ID, generalized hypotonia, and cerebral and cerebellar atrophy. Neurodevelopmental processes were found to be impaired in all individuals (15/15) and they presented with defective motor development and speech. Of those with speech issues, it was noted that they used few words or only short phrases. ID was severe in most individuals. Generalized hypotonia was observed in a majority of this cohort (78%), consistent with phenotypic descriptions from individuals with other Integrator complex variants.^{28–30} Brain MRI changes are present in all individuals for whom we have data, but this is variable among individuals, with cerebral progressive cortical atrophy, delayed myelination, and pontocerebellar hypoplasia being the most common findings (Tables 1 and S1). The motor delay was also variable, with eight individuals never achieving inde-

pendent ambulation. Those who did achieve independent ambulation did so late. Further, an ataxic gait was commonly observed in individuals with ambulation. Optic atrophy, visual impairment, and seizures documented in the most severe cases are believed to be the result of progressive degenerative processes involving the loss and/or dysfunction of brain cells (Table 1 and supplemental materials). A larger cohort of affected individuals will be needed to confirm the recurrence of some rare symptoms.

The Integrator complex comprises 15 subunits and is critical for regulating gene expression at nearly all RNAPII-transcribed loci.¹¹ Only 3 of the 15 Integrator complex subunits have previously been associated with human disease. Interestingly, individuals with bi-allelic variants in *INTS1* and *INTS8* display features similar to those observed in

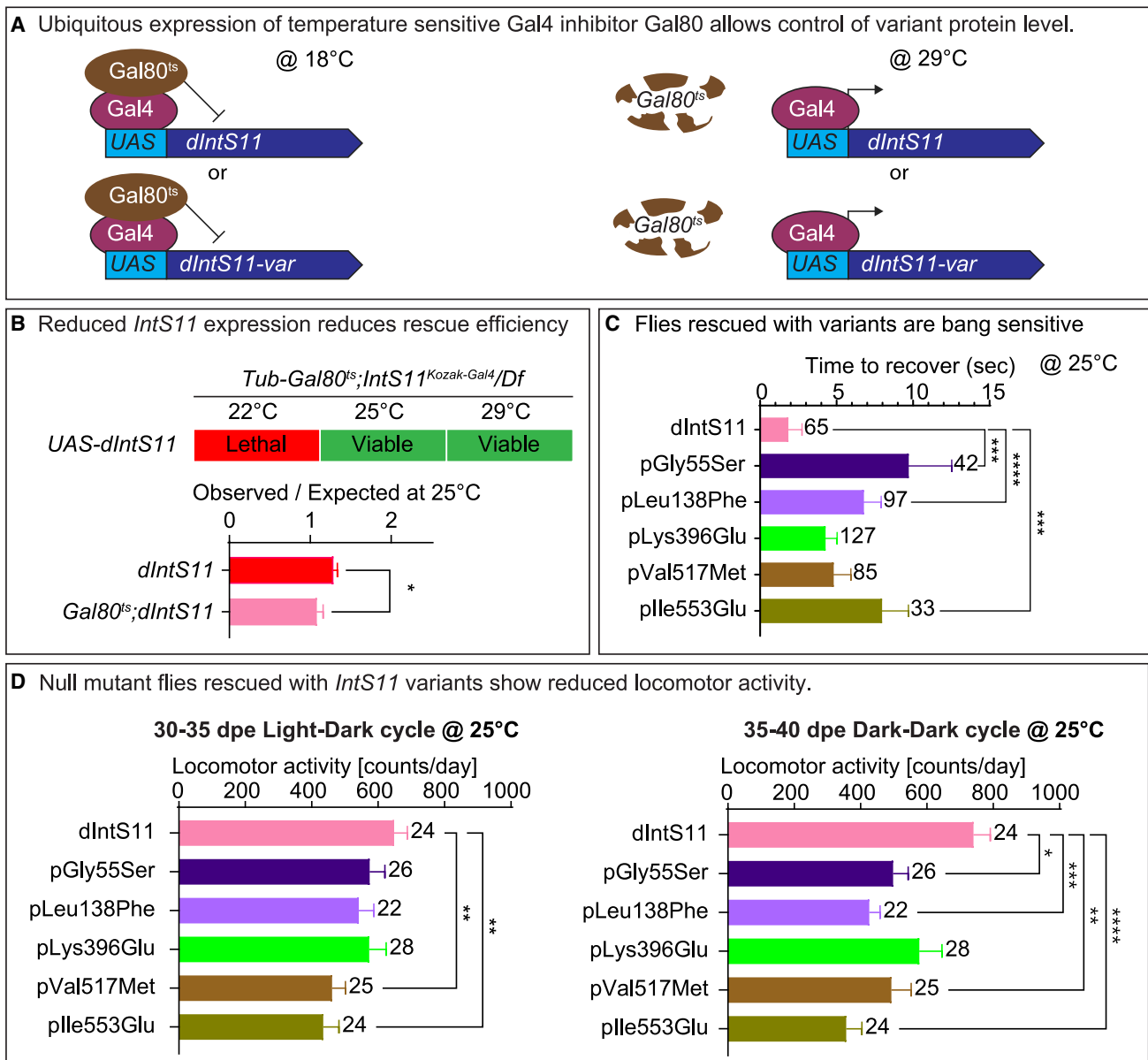


Figure 6. Reduced level of variant cDNA expression reveals locomotor defects in rescue flies

(A) Schematic representation of Gal80^{ts}-mediated Gal4-UAS system inhibition. Gal80^{ts} binds to Gal4 at a restrictive temperature (18°C) and blocks the transcriptional activation domain of Gal4, leading to the inhibition of downstream UAS constructs. At permissive temperature (29°C), Gal80^{ts} degrades, and Gal4 can drive the expression of downstream UAS constructs. Intermediate temperatures allow fine-tuning of UAS construct expression.

(B) Summary of lethality phenotype rescued with wild-type *dIntS11* at different temperatures and the observed/expected ratios at 25°C. Data are means + SEM. Unpaired test (*p < 0.05).

(C) Bang sensitivity of null mutant flies rescued with *IntS11* variants at 25°C measured using the time to recover after 15 s of vortex. Kruskal-Wallis test was followed by a Dunn's test. Data are means + SEM (*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01).

(D) Locomotor activity of null mutant flies rescued with *IntS11* variants at 25°C measured by DAM assay. Kruskal-Wallis test was followed by a Dunn's test. Data are means +SEM (*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, ****p < 0.0001).

individuals with variants in *INTS11*, including ID, DD with delayed or absent speech development, hypotonia, motor impairment, as well as some individuals with seizures, similar craniofacial abnormalities, and visual impairment (Table S1). Consistently, individuals with variants in *INTS13* show mainly craniofacial malformations, ID, and delayed language development, and some exhibit mild cerebellar atrophy.³⁰ The clinical picture is believed to resemble

the orofaciadigital (OFC2) syndrome (MIM: 252100) even though several features are also recognizable in *INTS11*-affected individuals of this cohort. Indeed, beside DD/ID and the abnormalities of the brain anatomy, some craniofacial features (i.e., microcephaly, hypertelorism, epicanthal folds, broad nasal root, and cleft lips) are also characteristic of the *INTS11*-related clinical portrait. However, individuals with variants in *INTS13* do not have prominent movement

defects, hypotonia, or seizures. This argues that the disruption of different subunits may have slightly different consequences in distinct tissues.

To date, all LoF alleles of Integrator complex subunits in various model organisms have been shown to cause homozygous lethality.^{56–61} Here we show that loss of *IntS11* in flies also causes lethality during larval development. We did not expect to observe that *IntS11* is not ubiquitously expressed in flies. Moreover, it is surprising that neuronal knockdown does not cause any observable phenotype, suggesting that Integrator complex function in neurons may not be essential or only very low levels of *IntS11* are required. However, reducing glial expression leads to reduced survival and a severe reduction in lifespan and climbing speed. This argues that a robust function of the complex in glia is important. Further studies are needed to understand the basis of the difference between these two cell types.

Fly *IntS11* mutants die at larval stages and the human cDNA did not rescue the lethality associated with loss of fly *IntS11*. One of the possible reasons is the lower conservation level observed between the CTD domain of human and fly proteins. The CTD of *INTS11* mediates the heterotrimer formation with *INTS4* and *INTS9* to create what has been termed the “Integrator Cleavage Module.”^{17–21} Similarly, the CTD of *INTS9* also shows lower levels of conservation with fly *IntS9*,¹⁷ which argues that co-evolution of the *INTS9* and *INTS11* interaction domains occurred. Hence, human *INTS11* may not be able to form a functional complex with the rest of the fly Integrator Cleavage Module. Additional studies are required to test the interaction between human *INTS11* and fly *IntS9* and *IntS4*. When introduced to fly protein, two missense variants (p.Arg17Leu and p.His414-Tyr) fail to rescue the lethality associated with *IntS11* loss. The p.His414Tyr variant is particularly intriguing because this histidine is involved in the coordination of zinc in the *INTS11* active site and suggest a critical role for RNA cleavage in brain development. Although all other variants tested (p.Gly55Ser, p.Leu138Phe, p.Lys396Glu, p.Val517Met, and p.Ile553Glu) rescue lethality, they all exhibit a significant reduction in lifespan. It is not yet understood how Integrator function is connected to aging, so it is not obvious why these flies die early. Given that the rescue strategy relies on overexpression based on the Gal4-UAS binary expression, the overexpression of the variants may mask the phenotype associated with the mild LoF of these alleles. We, therefore, reduced expression levels of variants that rescue lethality with Gal80^{ts}, a temperature-sensitive inhibitor of Gal4 activity. Upon reduction of the Gal4 activity and performing behavioral assays of eclosed adult flies, we observed bang sensitivity and aberrant behavior in DAM assays for five variants (p.Gly55Ser, p.Leu138Phe, p.Lys396Glu, p.Val517Met, and p.Ile553Glu), mild LoF alleles of *IntS11*. In summary, two variants correspond to severe LoF alleles and five are mild LoF alleles of *IntS11*.

In gnomAD, no individuals are reported to have a homozygous loss of *INTS11*.⁴³ However, the gene is tolerant of LoF mutations based on the pLI score⁴⁵ of 0. Hence, the

loss of one copy of the gene is not sufficient to cause noticeable clinical signs. We, therefore, argue that the individuals in our cohort have inherited a strong LoF allele and a mild LoF allele. Indeed, 4/15 individuals (subjects 1, 2, 5, and 9) with *INTS11* variants contain a frameshift or a stop gain variant, resulting in a truncated protein expression, and a missense variant (Table 1). Another 3/15 individuals (subjects 13–15) are homozygous for p.Arg23Leu, a severe LoF allele, and these individuals died at an early age. 2/15 individuals (subjects 3 and 4) carry the p.His420Tyr severe LOF variant and a mild missense variant (p.Leu144-Phe). Lastly, one individual (subject 6) has two mild LoF alleles (p.Gly61Ser and p.Val521Met). Finally, 8/15 individuals (subjects 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) carry missense variants of unknown significance.

Recent studies have documented a novel physical and genetic interaction between the Integrator complex and *BRAT1*, **BRCA1-Associated ATM activator 1**.⁶² *BRAT1* interacts with and stabilizes *INTS11*. Variants in *BRAT1* were previously associated with three different disorders based on the severity of the symptoms. The strongest forms cause lethal neonatal rigidity and multifocal seizure syndrome (RMFSL [MIM: 614498]), characterized by microcephaly, hypertonia, epilepsy, seizures, and death within two years of birth.^{63–65} Milder forms include neurodevelopmental disorder with cerebellar atrophy with or without seizures (NEDCAS [MIM: 618056]), epilepsy of infancy with migrating focal seizures (EIMFS), and congenital ataxia (CA).^{66–69} The mildest forms include non-progressive cerebellar ataxia (NPCA).^{70,71} The similarities of some symptoms observed in individuals with *BRAT1* and *INTS11* variants, including cerebellar atrophy, ataxia, and cognitive impairment, suggest that some *INTS11* variants affect this interaction. Further studies are required to determine molecular mechanisms of how the numerous *INTS11* variants disrupt function.

In summary, our findings show that bi-allelic variants in *INTS11* cause severe developmental delay, intellectual disability, language delay, and motor development disorders with brain MRI defects. Given that the human genome databases do not contain healthy individuals with homozygous loss of *INTS11* and that loss of *IntS11* is lethal in flies, fish, mouse, and worms, it is highly likely that *INTS11* is an essential gene in humans. Affected individuals with tested variants in *INTS11* typically inherit a strong LoF variant and a milder variant. Further studies examining the effect of the variants on the biochemical function of *INTS11* will lead to a better understanding of the pathology of *INTS11*-related disorders.

Consortia

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Supplemental information

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Declaration of interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Web resources

CADD, <https://cadd.gs.washington.edu/>
DIOPT, <https://www.flyrnai.org/diopt>
ENSEMBL Variant Effect Predictor, https://grch37.ensembl.org/Homo_sapiens/Tools/VEP
GenBank, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genbank/>
gnomAD, <http://gnomad.broadinstitute.org/>
IMARIS 9.9 Oxford Instruments, <https://imaris.oxinst.com>
MARRVEL, <http://www.marrvel.org/>
OMIM, <http://www.omim.org/>

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