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New research shows a technique using ion beams to better see the structures inside human brain cells, which could help our understanding of brain diseases.

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ROCKVILLE, MD — Improving the way scientists can see the microscopic structures of the brain can improve our understanding of a host of brain diseases, like Alzheimer's or multiple sclerosis. Studying these diseases is challenging and has been limited by accuracy of available models.

To see the smallest parts of cells, scientists often use a technique called electron microscopy.

Electron microscopy historically involves adding chemicals and physically cutting the tissue.

However, this approach can change the way the cells and structures look, perturbing their natural state, and can limit resolution. An alternative method, called cryo electron tomography (cryo ET), provides clearer images of the brain.

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By applying this approach to brain tissue from individuals with Alzheimer's disease, they were able 1