
Genome

The Story of the Most Astonishing
Scientific Adventure of Our Time —
The Attempt to Map All the Genes
in the Human Body

by Jerry E. Bishop
and
Michael Waldholz

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Genome

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Genome tells the story of what could be the most ambitious scientific research project ever undertaken: the attempt to identify all the genes in the human body, estimated to number from 50,000 to 100,000. These genes, located in the nucleus of the human cell, contain the blueprints for thousands of proteins that make up the body's tissues and vital organs, from muscles to brain cells, as well as the instructions for making the thousands of chemicals that literally give us life. By mapping the human genome, scientists can study and even reproduce the chemical components that run the human machine. This knowledge will revolutionize the treatments for and the prevention of diseases.

As individual genetic profiles are assembled, serious new ethical issues will have to be addressed. Already, insurance companies are planning to demand genetic tests to determine who is an insurance risk. Employers may soon require genetic tests to screen out those employees who might generate high medical bills sometime in the future or who are more genetically susceptible to occupational health problems. How will one's privacy be preserved when individual genetic profiles become as common as résumés?

Genome tells the stories of the scientists who are making some of the greatest scientific discoveries in history. It explains how we may soon have the ability to control our genetic fate. Along with it, though, we must face the great danger as well as the great potential posed by this unprecedented power.

— from the publisher

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Age-old pacifiers

In "Cry-babies demonstrate 'sweet' dispositions" (SN: 10/13/90, p.229), B. Bower describes a "new study" indicating that a few drops of sugar water fed to a crying baby will shorten the crying period. More than 75 years ago, I often saw my old Indian grandma fashion what she called a "sugar tit" to soothe my baby sister. She folded a clean rag into a square and tied a string around the center portion, leaving a "tit" about an inch long. When she dipped this in sugar water and placed it in the mouth of the baby, all became quiet. I am glad to learn that "science" has now established that it still works.

Wil Morse
Raleigh, N.C.

I wonder how many generations of babies will have to endure researchers' clinical attempts to discover what breast-feeding mothers already know: What babies really want is to be held and breast-fed by their mothers. No doubt five years from now scientists will discover that breast milk works even better than sucrose solution.

David R. Forrest
Malden, Mass.

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Senior Research/Staff Scientist

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