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Different Degrees of Gene Expression May Allow More Personalized Medicines

Submitted by [Christopher Taylor](#) Sat 12/17/2011

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When it comes to our health, appearance, and emotional character, DNA may not be as all-important as we've been led to believe. According to a study by the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), at least as important as our genome—the precise pattern of genes in our DNA—is our gene expression, or the degree to which the characteristics encoded in our genetic

blueprint actually manifest in the real world. Rather than a simple on/off switch, the authors of the study found genetic expression to occur on a surprisingly wide spectrum.

Working with the roundworm *Caenorhabditis elegans*, researchers developed a breakthrough method of identifying and measuring small differences in gene expression in vivo. This method allowed the scientists to focus in on genetic mutations that were not accounted for by strict genetic makeup or environment. These small mutations were then linked to differing degrees of expression in the individual. The goal of the research study was to develop such a methodology, but the researchers are also optimistic that refinements in their processes will allow them to also predict exactly which genes trigger which mutations, leading to more effective predictive treatments.

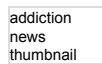
Another interesting finding from the study was the discovery of "generous" genes which amplify the effects of hundreds of other genes, and of some genes that seem only to support a few very specific processes. In predicting genetic expression, the degree to which a mutation will appear must take both types of genes into account.

While the implications of more finely-tuned medications and gene therapies are largely positive, researchers at the EMBL are also quick to point out that their results highlight just how complex the interactions of our thousands of genes are, and how much more research remains to be done.

Source: *The European Molecular Biology Laboratory-Centre for Genomic Regulation Systems*

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