

## Prenatal information: Ecstasy or agony?

*Slate* reposts a piece from *New Scientist*, [Do You Really Want To Know Your Baby's Genetics?](#) It is arranged as a series of questions which might arise from the new information. For me my frustration with this sort of discussion is rooted in reviewing old articles about “test-tube babies” in major newspapers from the 1970s and early 1980s. Today *in vitro* fertilization is banal and commonplace, but many of the same concerns were voiced back then which you see cropping up now in regards to personal genomics.

**My issue is not concern as such, but its inchoate character.** It is not uncommon for me to encounter people pursuing postgraduate work in science who express the opinion that “it’s scary,” the “it” being genetic information. When further queried the fear is generally layers upon layers of formless disquiet, some confusion about the specific details, as well as a default stance toward the “precautionary principle.” With all due respect this isn’t rocket science. There’s no need to be overly general, the issues we’ll face are precise and specific, and often actually implicitly or explicitly enumerated in pieces such as the one above, which nevertheless manage to convey an air of murky foreboding. Unfortunately, not all of the issues are easily resolved, nor are they uncontroversial. For example I think abortion is actually a clear and distinct problem, because most of know where we stand on that. But what about the threshold for what constitutes a genetically normal individual? Frankly, most of us haven’t even really grappled with what that’s supposed to mean (to a great extent, I haven’t, and I probably think about these things more than the normal person). We marry, and we have children. So it’s been back to the dawn of time.

**View the original article here: Prenatal information: Ecstasy or agony?**