

Embrace your genome

Virginia Hughes is “sick of reading about the dangers of the genome.” So she [complains over at Slate](#), eloquently, and I’m sick right with her.

[Hughes](#), who blogs at National Geographic and is among our sharper followers of genetics, doesn’t mean “dangers” as in hazardous habits of actual genomes: She means the overhyped danger of “[The DNA Dilemma](#),” as a recent Time cover called it, which is essentially whether normal regular everyday people can deal with genetic test results:

The primary question [the Time story] raises—how much information is too much information?—has been dominating commentaries about genetic testing in the medical literature.

But this is the wrong question, or at least one that’s becoming increasingly irrelevant. The personal genomics horse has bolted, and yet many paternalistic members of the medical community are still trying to shut the barn door. In doing so, they’re fostering a culture of DNA fear when what we really need is a realistic and nuanced genetics education.

Five years ago, pre-[23andme](#), one might reasonably wonder whether people would freak out over genetic results. Your genome can bear some pretty nasty news. My own 23andme tests, for instance, revealed a gene variant that doubles my statistical risk of getting Alzheimer’s, hiking it to over 14 percent. One person close to me, meanwhile found she has a gene variant wildly raising her risk of breast and ovarian cancer. A very few people, meanwhile, may learn they carry the gene that makes it absolutely certain that, should you live to your 30s or 40s (possibly sooner), you’ll develop Huntington’s disease, which is highly unpleasant and invariably fatal.

No wonder some people worried, some 5 years ago, that such news might be more than many people can handle. Today, though, it’s clear we should set those worries aside.

View the full article here: [Embrace Your Dangerous Genome](#)