

Why are gene patents controversial?

The following is an excerpt.

MANY people react with bafflement when they find out that it is possible to claim patents on human genes. But patent offices around the world have been handing out such patents for decades. More than 2,000 are thought to have been awarded in America alone. One particularly famous set of gene patents involves a firm called Myriad Genetics, which owns the rights to two genes called *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*. Mutations in those genes can dramatically increase a woman's chance of developing breast or ovarian cancer. Thanks to its patents, Myriad has a monopoly on the diagnostic tests that can look for such mutations—at least for now. On April 15th America's Supreme Court [began chewing over a case](#) brought against Myriad by the Association for Molecular Pathology, which wants such patents struck down. So what exactly is a gene patent, and why are they controversial?

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