

## Developing new antibiotics from human microbiome

No novel classes of antibiotic drugs have been produced for 25 years and, though scare stories about the consequences of emerging resistance to old ones are often exaggerated (the disappearance of bacterial diseases in rich countries in the 20th century owed far more to better public health and vaccines than to antibiotics), resistance is indeed on the rise. A bigger armoury would therefore be welcome.

Natural antibiotics are weapons used by one microorganism against another, so it is among micro-organisms that antibiotics-hunters hunt. But at the moment, they do so using a technique described by some, rather scathingly, as “grind and find”. Microbes are picked almost at random from the wild (one successful antibiotic, for example, began with a sample collected on Easter Island), then grown in laboratory conditions to see what turns up. If you are looking for weapons against human pathogens, though, surely the best place to look is in the human microbiome itself, for this collection of bugs that live on people’s skins and in their guts are the ones most likely to have evolved chemicals designed to deal specifically with interlopers invading their human territory.

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