

GLP Podcast: Smoking, drinking fueled by genetics? Women more empathetic than men; Enthusiasm for HIV vaccine wanes

If you drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes, a growing body of evidence suggests that your genetics may have predisposed you to those behaviors. Women are probably more empathetic than men, according to a new study. Is there an evolutionary explanation for this dichotomy? A recently developed HIV vaccine failed in clinical trials. Will we ever get an immunization against this deadly infection?

Join geneticist Kevin Folta and GLP contributor Cameron English on episode 203 of Science Facts and Fallacies as they break down these latest news stories:

- [**Do you drink alcohol or smoke tobacco? Your genes may play a role**](#)

It's well known that drug use is a complex behavior influenced by a variety of genetic and environmental factors. As time goes on, though, scientists are beginning to pin down the gene variants that influence someone's propensity to drink alcohol or smoke tobacco. Exactly how these genetic factors influence these habits remains a mystery. Nevertheless, researchers hope that deeper understanding of the genetics behind addiction could help identify people who should avoid certain substances, or perhaps develop therapies that reduce the risk of becoming addicted to harmful drugs.

- [**Are you good at perceiving other people's perspectives? Women score higher than men on 'cognitive empathy' test**](#)

A study of several hundred thousand people across 57 countries indicates that biological sex influences our ability to empathize with others. Psychologists administered a test designed to gauge cognitive empathy, the ability to perceive how someone else feels, and consistently found that women, regardless of their cultural background, were better at empathizing with those around them. It's not clear why this dimorphism exists, though some have speculated that this trait conferred an evolutionary advantage that aided survival long ago.

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- [**Will an HIV vaccine ever be developed? Failure of Janssen Pharmaceuticals' global testing raises doubts**](#)

Janssen Pharmaceuticals' once-promising HIV vaccine has failed in late-stage clinical trials, deflating hopes that we could soon immunize at-risk populations against an infection that still kills an estimated [**650,000 people**](#) every year. Although researchers have developed drugs that suppress the virus in infected individuals and prevent infection if taken routinely, a safe, effective vaccine that permanently prevents

infection remains elusive.

Listen to the podcast here: <https://tinyurl.com/33kj5wvh>

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