

CRISPR is cheap, effective and easy to use. That's why human germline editing scares even some proponents

After years of [hit-and-miss](#) efforts, a gene-editing system called Crispr that's cheap, effective and easy to use promises to change our relationship with genetics — for [better, worse or both](#). Its champions foresee using Crispr to control pests, increase food production and eliminate human diseases. They simultaneously worry that its use could unleash dangerous mutants, designer babies and new weapons of mass destruction. In the meantime, Crispr has given birth to a new biotechnology industry that is beginning to show promise in treating some intractable illnesses.

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A researcher with basic skills and just a [few hundred dollars](#)' worth of equipment can employ Crispr, creating enormous space for innovation, and abuse. The gene-editing system isn't perfect. It makes [unintended cuts](#) in DNA, with effects unknown. Scientists are working on minimizing these slip-ups. A newer method of gene revision, called [prime editing](#), is thought to produce fewer unwanted alterations.

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Potentially, a genetic disease could be eliminated from a family forever. But if something goes wrong, the consequences are potentially eternal, too, affecting future generations who would not have given their consent to the intervention. Some scientists [worry](#) that germline editing would invite enhancements of babies for non-medical reasons and could even lead to the division of humans [into subspecies](#).

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