IN THE NEWS

Combing through the genome to find the baldness spot

The mothers are to blame, yet again. "Scientists have discovered a gene that plays a crucial role in male hair loss on the X [chromosome...]. When it comes to going bald, a man is therefore likely to take after his maternal grandfather rather than his father" (*The Independent*, 22 May 2005).

In a collaborative effort, German scientists identified an androgen receptor gene — "long thought to be the root cause of balding" (*Globe and Mail*, 22 May 2005). Professor Nöthen, one of the group leaders, explained that "one variant of this gene was found among men who suffered from premature balding at a very early stage very much more often than among men who still had a full head of hair when over 60" (*Medical News Today*, 20 May 2005).

Balding men probably have too many androgen receptors in the scalp. "Either more androgen receptors are formed among the affected men, or the variant of the receptor which develops as a result of the genetic change is more stable and is not broken down so quickly" (*Medical News Today*).

Of course, male baldness is not a monogenic condition. Other genetic determinants are likely to lie on the autosomes, so we might not be able to blame it all on the mothers, after all. The search is on and scientists are looking for volunteers. "They especially want to hear from men under 40 with severe hair loss who have a brother who is also affected" (*Daily Mail*, 22 May 2005).

In Europe, it is apparently British and German men who are the most susceptible to baldness. Interestingly, "while Germans [go] for treatment, 90% of balding British men [are] too embarrassed to do anything about it" (*The Independent*).

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