Cure: Embryo Survival Gene to Control HIV

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Researchers at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research in Australia and at the University of Toronto in Canada have been investigating a newly discovered gene known as arih2, which is vital for the survival of embryos, and which may one day be manipulated to fight chronic infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and tuberculosis (TB). The gene produces a protein of the same name inside dendritic cells that is instrumental in the cell's capacity to either launch an immune response to a pathogen or repress the response in order to avoid chronic inflammation and autoimmunity. HIV in particular is able to trick dendritic cells out of sounding such an alarm. Because the gene has a unique structure, the scientists theorize that it is a good target for a potential drug that would be unlikely to affect other proteins in the body or cause major side effects. They believe that such a drug might temporarily boost the immune response to HIV to help control the virus, and that perhaps it could even be included in a preventative vaccine.

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