

SPOTTED

Spotted: Autism tsunami; unfolding DNA

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Parsing PTEN

A new study in the *Journal of Medical Genetics* looks at the divergent effects of mutations in **PTEN**, a gene best known for its role in cancer that is **also implicated in autism**. The study suggests that mutations that dampen PTEN activity — but don't quash it — **are more likely to result in autism** than in tumors. You can read more about autism's cancer connection **here**.

Puzzle piece

The *MIT Technology Review* delves into the genetics of autism with **a long article** that follows the career of **Michael Wigler**, professor at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York, who has helped to uncover a slew of genes tied to autism. Wigler says he was inspired to study autism by a former girlfriend's brother (something he also described in **our own profile** of him). The article also features **beautiful artwork by people with autism**, which, by coincidence, we also included in **our year-end special**.

Unfolding DNA

Need a quick tutorial on chromatin looping? Check out this **eight-minute stop-motion 'PaperFlick'** published alongside a paper in *Cell*. We covered the paper **as a Toolbox**, but the video — which uses origami and a juice box to explain the three-dimensional structure of the genome — is definitely worth a look. It's the latest 'video abstract' from the esteemed journal, which is also producing some seriously cute **'graphical abstracts.'**

Autism ‘bogeyman’

A pesticide ingredient called glyphosate is the latest chemical being blamed for autism. But a blog post on Science-Based Medicine lifts the veil on this “environmental bogeyman,” calling its **purported link to autism “bad logic” and “pure speculation.”** The post shows how a **possibly random correlation** backed by a so-called scientist can trigger unsubstantiated fears.

Autoantibody effect

A study in *Cerebral Cortex* breathes new life into an old theory of autism: that rogue antibodies produced by an expectant mother may **attack the brain tissue of her unborn child.** The mouse study suggests that these so-called autoantibodies can **trigger neuron enlargement and proliferation.** Mice exposed to autoantibodies in the womb have enlarged brains, or **macrocephaly** — a feature sometimes seen in autism.

Autism ‘tsunami’

A story by *U.S. News & World Report* warns of an impending “autism tsunami” as a **growing number of children with the disorder enter adulthood.** Angela Lello, director of housing and community living for the science and advocacy organization **Autism Speaks**, says some 50,000 of these individuals in the U.S. age into a “woefully inadequate” support system each year. “There are lots of long waiting lists,” she says. “In some states, it can take as long as 10 years to gain access to services.”
