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ALCOHOL-RELATED HYPERTENSION

People who drink alcohol daily and outside of meals are more prone to high blood pressure than people with different drinking patterns, researchers say. In a recent study involving 1,057 men and 1,422 women, scientists at the University of Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences analyzed blood pressure samplings from groups of nondrinkers and monthly, weekend and daily drinkers, including those who imbibed without food.

Results showed that the prevalence of hypertension was highest among the daily drinkers, about 40 percent. The researchers defined hypertension as a systolic pressure (the first number in a blood-pressure reading) of 140 or higher and a diastolic pressure (the second number) of 90 or higher. Of those who drank only outside of meals, 35 percent had high blood pressure, compared to 25 percent for people who drank with food.

HEAD COUNT

About 6.1 billion people are alive today, the most ever at any one time in history. This raises an intriguing question: Collectively, how many people have lived on Earth?

Carl Haub, a senior demographer at the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, D.C., answered this question for *Discover News Service*. As a starting point, Haub considered primitive populations from 50,000 years ago and possible fertility rates that might have produced six to eight offspring per mother.

Before the invention of agriculture, he says, world population was probably no more than 5 million to 10 million, kept low by the hunter-gatherer lifestyle. By the time of Christ, the population had risen to about 300 million, judging from fragmentary censuses in Rome, China and the Mediterranean.

By the 1300s, birthrates declined, and from the 18th century onward, records show that birthrates continued to fall in industrialized countries. However, rapid growth in developing countries caused the world population to soar from just 1.6 billion a century ago, *Discover News* reports. So the percentage of people alive today compared with births throughout history is actually rising.

Haub estimates a total of 106 billion humans have been born. By that estimate, the people alive today are 5.7 percent of all who have lived.

News briefs compiled by Kurt Loft, Media General News Service.

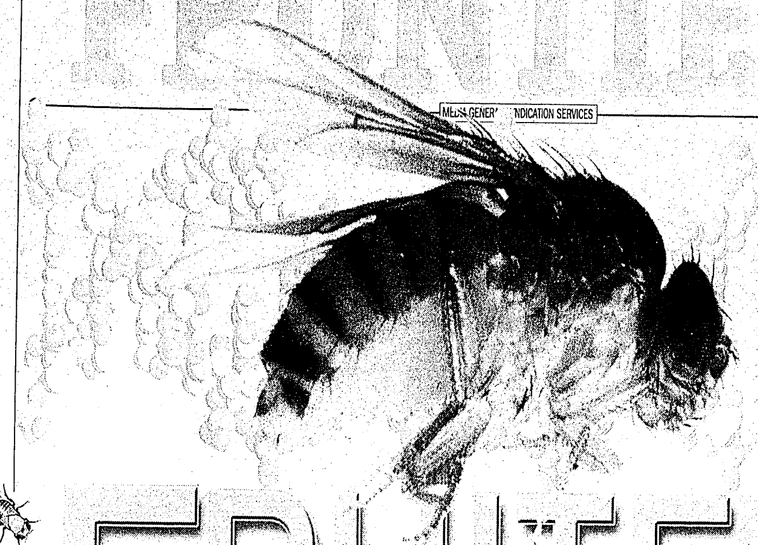
site BYTES

INVITING ILLUSIONS

For the most comprehensive collection of optical and sensory illusions online, check out **illusionworks.com/index.shtml**.

This award-winning collection consists of innumerable interactive demonstrations, up-to-date reliable scientific explanations, illusion artwork, interactive puzzles, 3-D graphics and much more.

Don't miss the breathing square under interactive demonstrations. Also, try the galloping donkey puzzle in the illusion-puzzle section. There is literally hours and hours of fun and cool material here.



FRUITFUL findings

Biologists have identified genes in the common fruit fly that appear to be counterparts of genes responsible for more than 700 diseases in people

By Kurt Loft
MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE

We swat them without a second thought, curse them as they buzz the picnic table, spray chemicals to keep them off citrus trees.

Now, we might want to coddle the little critters and give them a big kiss. That's because biologists have identified an amazing number of genes in the fruit fly that appear to mirror those that cause diseases in people.

Specifically, the genetic stuff found in Drosophila melanogaster — the scientific name for this tiny insect — is similar to genes responsible for more than 700 genetic diseases that have plagued humans for centuries.

Reporting their discovery in the June issue of *Genome Research*, scientists at the University of California, San Diego, say they have a powerful new tool in identifying many genes that cause a variety of illnesses. The discovery also might help researchers better understand the underlying biochemical mechanisms that could lead to better treatments of such diseases as Alzheimer's.

All this from an annoying little bug?

"The fruit fly is very useful," biologist Ethan Bier said by telephone from his office at the University of California. "We can use anywhere from 100,000 to a million flies in an experiment to look for rare genetic situations. With mice, this kind of research is limited."

Fruit flies make ideal laboratory animals because they are cheap and abundant, and their genetic makeup is well-documented. Animal-rights activists don't seem to care if anybody kills a bunch of flies, as opposed to rabbits or dogs. Drosophila also lives about two weeks, offering what scientists call a rapid generation time, which is useful in research.

"When a generation is 10 days instead of months or years, you can go through so many more genetic experiments," Bier says. "You can do 10 times as many experiments that you can do with mice."

Drosophila became even more popular last year when researchers finished mapping its complete genome. Drosophila has about 13,000 genes, compared to roughly 31,000 in humans.

"It's a great model system because of its genetic simplicity," Bier said.

Scientists have known for years that fruit flies and people share many similar genes, but the surprise is how deep these similarities run. Most every category of human genetic disease, researchers say, is represented with a counterpart in the fly.

Human disorders that can be studied in the fly's genetic makeup include neurological, immunological, cardiovascular, auditory, visual, developmental and metabolic diseases and some forms of cancer.

The university team screened genes involved in more than 900 human genetic diseases against genes in the complete Drosophila genome. The comparison found something remarkable — 548 fruit-fly genes were similar to those involved in 714 human genetic disorders. Such a similarity, the scientists say, could have statistically occurred by chance only one time out of 10 billion.

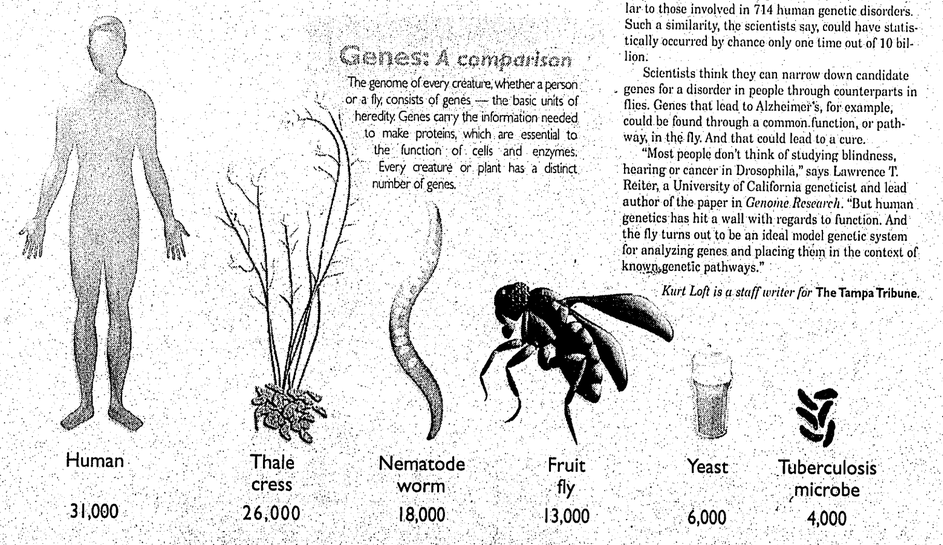
Scientists think they can narrow down candidate genes for a disorder in people through counterparts in flies. Genes that lead to Alzheimer's, for example, could be found through a common function, or pathway, in the fly. And that could lead to a cure.

"Most people don't think of studying blindness, hearing or cancer in Drosophila," says Lawrence T. Reiter, a University of California geneticist and lead author of the paper in *Genome Research*. "But human genetics has hit a wall with regards to function. And the fly turns out to be an ideal model genetic system for analyzing genes and placing them in the context of known genetic pathways."

Kurt Loft is a staff writer for **The Tampa Tribune**.

Genes: A comparison

The genome of every creature, whether a person or a fly, consists of genes — the basic units of heredity. Genes carry the information needed to make proteins, which are essential to the function of cells and enzymes. Every creature or plant has a distinct number of genes.



Human	Thale cress	Nematode worm	Fruit fly	Yeast	Tuberculosis microbe
31,000	26,000	18,000	13,000	6,000	4,000

Use shortcut to instantly delete e-mail messages from Outlook Express

plugged in with Doug Stanley

Imagine taking out the trash only to find later that it had mysteriously reappeared in another room of the house.

That's not unlike what happens with many of the most popular e-mail programs.

When you delete a message, often it is moved to a folder called Deleted Items or Trash or something similar — but it isn't truly deleted. That's so you can recover the message if you've gone mouse happy and accidentally deleted messages you wanted to keep. But you probably don't want to keep all those discarded messages around, particularly if they're spam or confidential and you share your computer with others.

You can usually override this safety net if you want your deleted e-mails to be permanently deleted.

In Outlook Express, hold down the Shift key as you delete the message. It will be permanently deleted, bypassing the Deleted Items folder.

If you use that method, you can't go back. There's no changing your mind. When it's gone, it's gone.

Many e-mail clients offer a feature that neither deletes your discarded messages instantly, nor saves them to clutter up your hard drive.

To turn on that option in Outlook Express, select the Tools menu and click Options.

Click the Maintenance tab, and click in the checkbox beside "Empty messages from the 'Deleted Items' folder on exit." Click Apply and then OK.

While Outlook Express is open, your discarded messages will stay in the Deleted Items folder where you can retrieve them if you like.

But when you close the program, all messages in the Deleted Items folder will be deleted.

Most other popular e-mail programs offer similar options. Where you'll find them varies from program to program, but they're usually pretty easy to find if you just poke around.

Another feature of many e-mail programs that can be a blessing or a curse is what happens to e-mail messages that you send.

If you don't share your computer with anyone, it can be handy to have your e-mail program keep a copy of every message you send.

That way, you'll have a record of your correspondence if you ever need it.

That can be especially useful for those times when replies don't include or reference your original message — and you don't remember what you wrote in that message.

If you share a computer, you might not want to keep a record of every message you send.

If, for example, your significant other stumbled over your correspondence with a travel agent for that surprise vacation, it wouldn't be much of a surprise now, would it?

In Outlook Express, you'll find the settings for the feature by selecting the Tools menu, clicking Options and clicking the Send tab.

Click in the checkbox next to "Save copy of sent messages in the Sent Items folder" to turn it off or on. Click Apply and then OK.

Doug Stanley writes about computers and the Internet. Write him at **dstanley@tampatrib.com** *or* **The Tampa Tribune**, *P.O. Box 191, Tampa, FL 33601.*