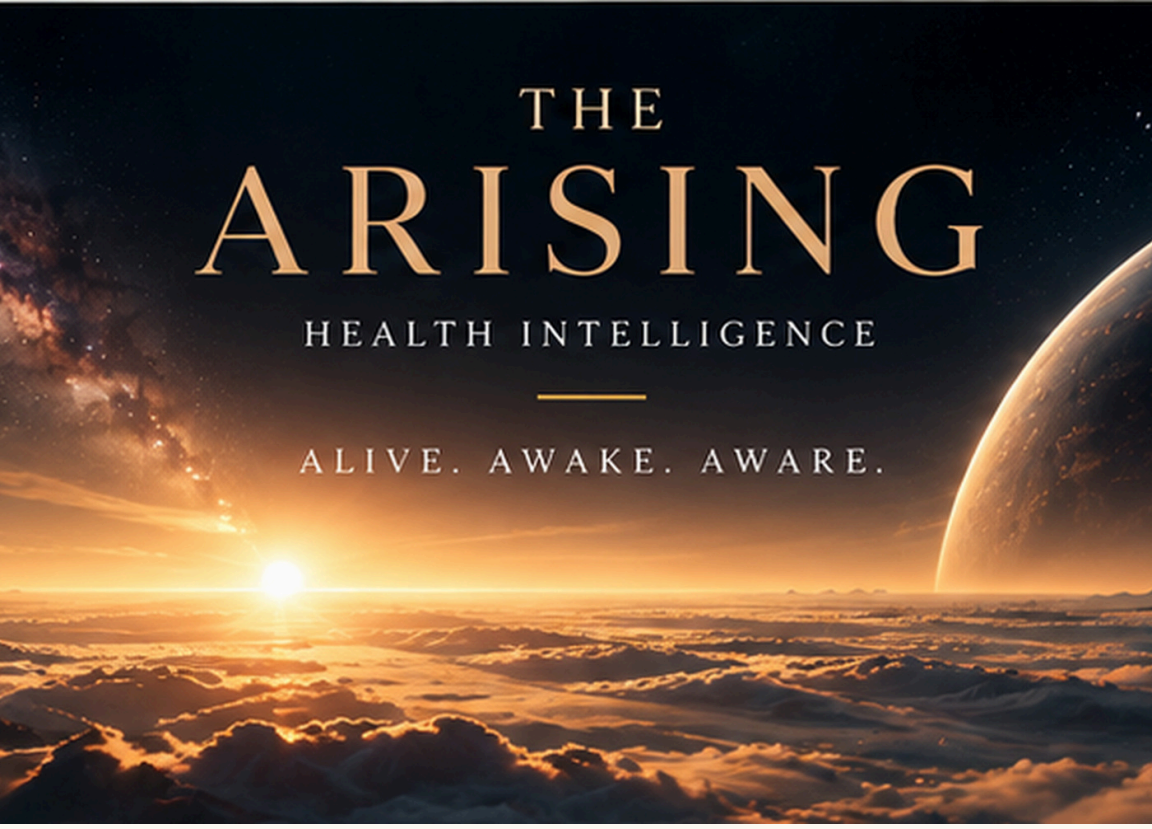


37 / EVERYDAY HEALTH

The Ancestor's Genes and What They're Becoming

Inherited information, changing interpretation, and the work between a DNA result and a useful decision.

JOHN GRIFFIN, MD

REVIEW EDITION · OCTOBER 2026

Information arrives before meaning

A genome contains inherited information. A report contains an interpretation of selected parts of that information. The two are not the same, and the interpretation may change as knowledge improves.

This is part of the promise of personalized medicine. It is also why a detailed report should not be mistaken for a complete account of a person's future. Family history, current health, environment, and the limitations of the measurement remain relevant.

What a pilot trial found

The MedSeq pilot randomized 100 generally healthy adults to a family-history report alone or a report supplemented by interpreted whole-genome sequencing. Sequencing produced additional molecular findings and prompted more clinical actions, but the study did not establish that those extra actions improved long-term health. It had limited size and ancestral and socioeconomic diversity. [1]

This makes an important distinction visible: finding more can change care without yet proving that the change is beneficial.

Keep the kind of result clear

A variant associated with a high-risk inherited disorder, a carrier result, a pharmacogenomic association, and a polygenic risk estimate answer different questions. A variant of uncertain significance carries uncertainty in its name for a reason.

Likewise, a consumer raw-data file and a clinically validated sequencing result should not be treated as equivalent inputs. Consequential decisions may require confirmation and

appropriate genetics expertise. The report's source, test method, and intended use matter.

A useful relationship with uncertainty

A good process can state what is known, what remains uncertain, what action is justified, and what would warrant reinterpretation later. It should also respect the person's choices about learning and sharing information that may have implications for relatives.

The title of this booklet points to two kinds of change. Our understanding of inherited information changes, and the life in which that information is expressed continues to unfold. Neither process grants complete control.

The value of genomics will be measured by the decisions it helps people make and the outcomes those decisions improve. More personal detail is valuable when it leads to more useful care, with uncertainty carried honestly along the way.

SOURCES & READING SCOPE

Keep the claim beside its evidence

1. Jason L Vassy, Kurt D Christensen, Erica F Schonman, et al. The Impact of Whole-Genome Sequencing on the Primary Care and Outcomes of Healthy Adult Patients: A Pilot Randomized Trial. Annals of internal medicine. 2017 Aug 01;167(3):159-169. doi:10.7326/M17-0188. PMID:28654958. Open source →

Selected primary publication records and abstracts checked 25–26 October 2026. This is a focused reading companion, not a systematic review, a treatment protocol, or a complete appraisal of methods, supplements and later evidence.

KEEP FOLLOWING THE IDEA

Part of a connected collection

Return to a subject, follow a related booklet, or explore the wider projects. These links organize reading; they do not imply that one scientific finding proves another.

This booklet online →

Booklet directory · all 48 →

Atlas · Low-cost genome sequencing →

Arising Health website →

The Arising book →

The Long Game →

Listen & watch →

Related booklets

07 · Editing the Code →

12 · The Quiet Work Behind a Thought →

39 · The Study That Would Change My Mind →

28 · Finding Cancer Earlier →

The online review collection is hosted in the shared Atlas. Its existing access settings apply. The public website remains a separate destination.