

# Unregulated DIY Gene Therapy: Learn How One Man's Fascinating Quest To Hack His Own Genes May Increase Your Lifespan

By Brian Hanley | [MIT Tech Review](#)



In a dream Brian Hanley told me about, he's riding a bus when he meets a man in dark leather clothing. Next thing he knows, he is splayed across a tilted metal bed, being electrocuted.

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The dream was no doubt connected to events that took place last June at a plastic surgeon's office in Davis, California. At Hanley's request, a doctor had injected into his thighs

copies of a gene that Hanley, a PhD microbiologist, had designed and ordered from a research supply company. Then, plunging two pointed electrodes into his leg, the doctor had passed a strong current into his body, causing his muscle cells to open and absorb the new DNA.

The effort is the second case *MIT Technology Review* has documented of unregulated gene therapy, a risky undertaking that is being embraced by a few daring individuals seeking to develop anti-aging treatments. The gene Hanley added to his muscle cells would make his body produce more of a potent hormone—potentially increasing his strength, stamina, and life span.

Hanley, 60, is the founder of a one-man company called Butterfly Sciences, also in Davis. After encountering little interest from investors for his ideas about using DNA injections to help strengthen AIDS patients, he determined that he should be the first to try it. “I wanted to prove it, I wanted to do it for myself, and I wanted to make progress,” says Hanley.

Most gene therapy involves high-tech, multimillion-dollar experiments carried out by large teams at top medical centers, with an eye to correcting rare illnesses like hemophilia. But Hanley showed that gene therapy can be also carried out on the cheap in the same setting as liposuction or a nose job, and might one day be easily accessed by anyone.

In an attempt to live longer, some enthusiasts of anti-aging medicine already inject growth hormone, swallow fullerenes, or gulp megavitamins, sometimes with disregard for mainstream medical thinking. Now unregulated gene therapy could be the next frontier. “I think it’s damn crazy,” says Bruce Smith, a professor at Auburn University who develops genetic treatments for dogs. “But that is human nature, and it’s colliding with technology.”

**[Related Article: Outsmart Your Genes: Use Your DNA To Create A Healthy Life Plan](#)**

To pull off his experiment, Hanley used his scientific knowledge and part of his life savings. He put his insider know-how to work to procure supplies, order blood tests, win the sign-off of a local ethics committee, and engage a plastic surgeon who helped give him two treatments, a small dose in 2015 and then a larger one last June.

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