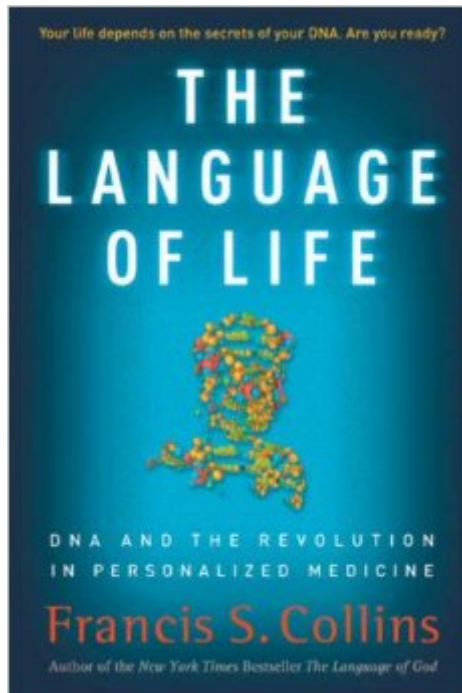


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# The Language Of Life: DNA And The Revolution In Personalized Medicine



## Synopsis

"His groundbreaking work has changed the very ways we consider our health and examine disease." • "Barack Obama From Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institute of Health, 2007 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and 15-year head of the Human Genome Project, comes one of the most important medical books of the year: *The Language of Life*. With accessible, insightful prose, Dr. Collins describes the medical, scientific, and genetic revolution that is currently unlocking the secrets of "personalized medicine," and offers practical advice on how to utilize these discoveries for you and your family's current and future health and well-being. In the words of Dr. Jerome Groopman (*How Doctors Think*), *The Language of Life* "sets out hope without hype, and will enrich the mind and uplift the heart." •

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book provides both academic and practical information about the latest developments in DNA research. Some of the practical advice could help you reach educated decisions about what medical treatments to pursue. It's likely that even many doctors aren't yet aware of certain kinds of DNA

tests that can be crucial indicators about which treatments might be effective and which ones might actually be lethal. For example, any woman contemplating having a prophylactic mastectomy might want to read this book first to learn about how new BRCA tests could more accurately predict her chances of eventually getting many forms of cancer. DNA tests available now can help a woman who has already been diagnosed with cancer determine whether certain forms of chemotherapy would help her, or whether they would just be needlessly, and perhaps fatally, debilitating. There is also a DNA test that would alert doctors that certain people might have a special sensitivity to coumadin, a drug widely used as a blood thinner. Many medical centers don't perform this test before coumadin is prescribed, and excessive bleeding and even lethal hemorrhaging can be the result. A small percentage of people have a toxic reaction to statins, the drugs now commonly prescribed to lower cholesterol. A DNA test now available could identify those people for whom the drugs might pose dangerous problems. But DNA analysis doesn't have to be limited to the human's normal genome. By analyzing the genome of the cancer cells themselves, doctors can now refine their treatments. Collins covers a variety of such topics that it would really benefit any urgent consumers of medical care to educate themselves about before proceeding with treatment.

The Language of Life: DNA and the Revolution in Personalized Medicine Book Review by Richard L. Weaver II, Ph.D. Before I was a speech-communication major in college--and since I was in the ninth grade in junior-high-school, I might add--I wanted to be a doctor. Most of my courses in high school and early college were all science courses. My interest in science did not wear off, and when I graduated from the University of Michigan, I had to make general science a minor since I had had so many courses in the area, and my graduation would have been delayed for at least a year if I had to pick up a new minor. All this is explanation for my love of science and, thus, of this book. Collins has written a science book on DNA for the masses, and I absorbed the information like a sponge in water. It is a terrific read not just for Collins' unbelievable knowledge, the revealing and interesting examples cited, the comfortable, readable, and friendly writing style, or even the specific detail he offers: "The best-understood genes are those that code for protein. This process involves first making an RNA copy of the DNA; that RNA is then transported to the ribosome 'protein factories' in the cytoplasm, where the letters of the RNA code are translated into the amino acids used by proteins.... This translation is carried out using a triplet code word; for example, AAA in the RNA codes for the amino acid lysine, and AGA codes for arginine" (p. 7). Most of the language is not of this style and not nearly as complex. But, getting back to my point about why the book is a terrific read.

I have just finished reading "the Language of Life". I enjoyed reading it. It was much better than I was expecting. The coverage of genetics was at such a level that it was easy to understand (perhaps too easy?). It's difficult not to catch Francis Collins' optimism and enthusiasm as to the promise of mapping the human genome, and being able to work out which genes are really important in producing malignant tumours, and hence which genes are promising targets for treatment strategies. Previously, because mapping the genome was so difficult and expensive, it was difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the important genes in tumours, from unimportant mutations resulting from increased cell division or loss of DNA repair genes. I only have a few quibbles. I don't think it is useful to define mutations as being always harmful, everything else just being variants. Mutations can be harmful, beneficial and neutral (the usual situation). Secondly, I didn't like the end of each chapter, where he has a "What you can do now to join ... revolution?" Generally, it's a website providing information. The chapter on ageing has a beauty of a web address for [...] ... with a long sequence of letters, numbers and symbols, which navigates to I don't know where. I found the tool easily just navigating from the homepage (the address was much shorter, I wonder if Francis Collins gave the address for his results?). Thirdly, I think that missing out on the mitochondrial story with regard to ageing, is missing the most important cause of ageing. Nick Lane's book "Power, Sex, Suicide: Mitochondria and the Meaning of Life" is a good book for the discussion of this.

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