

Eight Years Old and Still An Infant

- Jacob Keller

Gabby Williams suffers from a condition so rare that it is yet to have a name. This disorder slows growth rate dramatically and only two others in the world are known to have it. Mutations to a regulatory gene on the X chromosome that controls what the medical researcher Robert Walker calls “developmental inertia” has slowed the rate of maturing and left Williams as an infant... even though she is technically a child..... let's settle with child infant. Although this mutation comes with a slew of medical problems, including deafness and the inability to walk, eat or speak, if manipulated skillfully could be used to make someone immortal. With this immortality things such as Alzheimer's disease could be prevented. Not only these handful of people could lead to perpetual life, but many other animals hold bits of genetic coding that would keep one alive longer than their life expectancy. The naked mole rat has cells that remain precise at replicating even when they get old. This makes them less susceptible to diseases that would be acquired from old age such as certain cancers. Giant tortoises evolved to slow cellular dilapidation, a few living for over two hundred years. Flatworms have incredible regenerative abilities, being able to create new muscles, skin, and even brains. In fact scientists were able to create an entire colony of over twenty thousand flatworms from chopping up a single original. Lobsters produce large quantities of telomerase, an enzyme that allows them to still produce large shells even when they are 60 years old. A certain type of jellyfish the *Turritopsis dohrnii*, nicknamed the “Benjamin Button jellyfish” can essentially reverse its life. It can grow younger as time passes, eventually reaching its first stage of development. The key to immortality lies in the genome of a plethora of animals, and with deft genetic engineering it is doesn't seem quite so far fetched.

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