

Darwin Diagnosed

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While waiting in digs to join HMS Beagle just before Christmas 1831, Charles Darwin suffered severe heart palpitations. Fearing he had had a heart attack Darwin told no one lest he was not allowed on his voyage of a lifetime. For five years on the Beagle, Darwin had no more trouble, except seasickness and a severe fever in South America. However, on returning to England, marrying, and moving to London, he began suffering from a wide range of gut and systemic symptoms. He would suffer these for the rest of his life. They forced him to move out of London to the quiet village of Down(e). He was never diagnosed until now, in spite of claims of arsenic poisoning, Chagas' disease, and various descriptive gut ailments.

Here I show that Darwin's 50-year symptoms match exactly those of lactose and food intolerance. Furthermore, the molecular mechanism responsible, based on metabolic toxins produced by gut microbes, have major implications today for the most common problem seen by GPs, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), as well as the type 2 diabetic epidemic, and Parkinson's disease. Lactose intolerance also has fascinating things to tell us about molecular evolution - the origin of the unique sugar in milk, why white humans were able to invade the planes of Europe 10,000 years ago, and one of the most intriguing problems in evolution - the origin of a new enzyme.

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