



# Monkey See

Posted Feb 15, 2010



The cure for color blindness may be within sight. Gene therapy has given adult male squirrel monkeys—which, like colorblind people, lack the pigment gene that lets them distinguish red and green—a glimpse of hues they've never seen before.

About 20 weeks after receiving retinal injections of the L-opsin gene, color-blind monkeys began spotting red and green dots on a computer screen, and their perception improved with time. Conventional wisdom had held that color vision relies on an inflexible nerve network hardwired early in development. But University of Washington neuroscientist Jay Neitz says this study shows that “the brain can adapt preexisting circuitry for a new purpose. It's extremely exciting.” Someday the therapy could cure the estimated 200 million people, mostly men, who miss out on everything from autumn leaves to signs of sunburn to sight-oriented careers—and might spark fixes for other genetic blindnesses.

Meanwhile, says Neitz, at least one wise-eyed monkey has a new penchant for green M&M's. —*Jennifer S. Holland*

*Photograph by Kevin Horan*