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Very Big and Promising News on Stem Cell Research

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For the first time, scientists now claim to have transformed ordinary human skin cells into cells equal in “totipotentiality” to embryonic stem cells. The report is published in today’s edition of *The Washington Post* and the full research report is to be published in the journal *Science* this week.

Here’s how the *Post* described the breakthrough: *Scientists for the first time have turned ordinary skin cells into what appear to be embryonic stem cells — without having to use human eggs or make new human embryos in the process, as has always been required in the past, a Harvard research team announced yesterday.*

Later in the article: *Until now, the only way to turn a person’s ordinary cell into a “personalized” stem cell such as this was to turn that ordinary cell into an embryo first and later destroy the embryo to retrieve the new stem cells growing inside — a process widely known as “therapeutic cloning.”*

That prospect, like others in the promising arena of human embryonic stem cell research, has stirred strong emotions among those who believe that days-old human embryos should not be intentionally destroyed.

The Harvard University research team that produced the study warned that its findings were preliminary. Nevertheless, this offers a real and substantial hope that stem cell research can progress without the destruction of human embryos.

UPDATE: Harvard University is now out with a press release on the research. The release opens: *A new type of hybrid cell created at Harvard University could eventually solve the mystery of how embryonic stem cells develop into specialized adult cells, and provide genetically tailored treatments for many human diseases. What’s more, the technique holds out the possibility of doing this without creating or destroying human embryos. The researchers fused adult skin cells with embryonic stem cells in such a way that the genes of the embryonic cells reset the genetic clock of the adult cells, turning them back to their embryonic form.*

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