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A baffling protein

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Barrier-to-autointegration factor (BAF) is a cellular protein that prevents destructive insertions of retroviruses into their own genomes. In the August 1 Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Zheng *et al*. propose that BAF's usual function may be in chromosome condensation (*Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 2000, **97**:8997-9002). BAF added to DNA forms primarily a dodecamer that binds five or six DNA molecules. The processes of DNA binding and formation of the higher-order BAF multimer are coupled. Interference with BAF function by RNAi in worm embryos results in abnormal chromosome segregation, with chromatin trailing between segregating chromosomes. Thus BAF may function in chromosome organization or condensation.

References

1. A previously unidentified host protein protects retroviral DNA from autointegration.

2. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, [http://www.pnas.org/]