

# Nobel Prize in medicine for touch research

Two California scientists won the Nobel Prize in medicine for work on how the human body senses temperature through touch, which may have applications from pain management to VR.



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David Julius, a professor at the University of California, San Francisco, and Ardem Patapoutian, a molecular biologist and neuroscientist at Scripps Research in La Jolla, California, will share the 10 million kronor (\$1.1 million) award.

The scientists identified critical missing links that help understand the interplay between our senses and the environment, according to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

The knowledge is being used to develop treatments for a range of health conditions including chronic pain. It could also help make VR into a tactile experience.

## A secret of nature

Julius used a compound from chili peppers that induces a burning sensation to identify a sensor in the skin's nerve endings that responds to heat. Patapoutian used pressure-sensitive cells to discover a new class of sensors that respond to mechanical stimuli in the skin and internal organs.

“This really unlocks one of the secrets of nature,” says Thomas Perlmann, the secretary-general for the Nobel Assembly.  
“It’s a very important and profound discovery.”

Annual prizes for achievements in physics, chemistry, medicine, peace and literature were established in the will of Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor of dynamite, who died in 1896.

A prize in economic sciences was added by Sweden’s central bank in 1968.

By Marthe Fourcade

– with assistance from James Paton.

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