

Human ability good in tracking odors

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University of California-Berkeley scientists say although humans may never match a dog's tracking ability, we apparently can sniff out and locate odors.

Student volunteers presented with odors to one nostril or the other could reliably discern where the odor was coming from, and functional magnetic resonance images showed the brain is set up to pay attention to the difference between what the left and right nostrils sense.

"It has been very controversial whether humans can do egocentric localization, that is, keep their head motionless and say where the spatial source of an odor is," said study co-author Noam Sobel, associate professor of psychology. "It seems that we have this ability and that, with practice, you could become really good at it."

In future experiments, UC Berkeley biophysics graduate student Jess Porter and Sobel plan to train volunteers to track odors in the field to test the limits of odor localization in humans.

Porter, Sobel and their colleagues reported the study in the Aug. 18 issue of the journal *Neuron*.

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