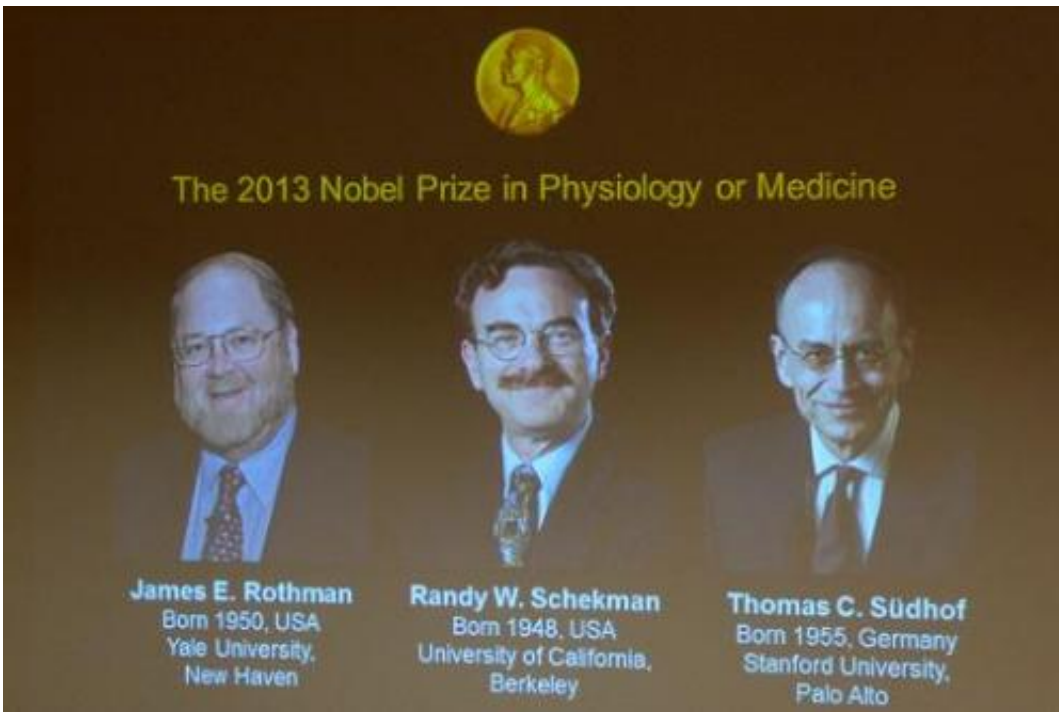


# Nobel medicine laureate was told cell idea was 'nuts'

October 7 2013

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A screen displays photos of James E Rothman from the US, Randy W Schekman from the US and Thomas C Suedhof from Germany, the winners of the Nobel prize for medicine, at a press conference on October 7, 2013 in Stockholm

James Rothman, one of the three recipients of the [Nobel Prize for Medicine](#), said Monday that when he started research into cells' internal transport systems his colleagues called it "nuts".

"In the earlier years when I started this project at Stanford University

everyone told me it was nuts to go and try to reproduce the mysterious complexities that occur in a whole cell," he said in an interview on the Nobel Prize website.

Rothman, a 62-year-old professor and chairman of the department of cell biology at Yale University, won the prize on Monday along with fellow US researcher Randy Schekman and Thomas Suedhof of Germany for their groundbreaking work on how cells produce and export molecules.

Their discoveries have unlocked insights into diseases ranging from diabetes to immune-system disorders, the Nobel Committee said.

Rothman began studying cell transport in mammals' [cells](#) in 1980s and 1990s, and eventually discovered proteins that fit together like a zipper, allowing packages of cargo to dock in the right parts of a cell.

He said the call from Sweden woke him in the middle of the night and that it was like an "out of body experience".

Asked whether he looked forward to increased media interest in his work, he said he welcomed "the opportunity to be a spokesman for the field and for medical science", a role he appeared to relish.

His research was "absolutely fascinating", he said.

"One of the major lessons in all of biochemistry, [cell biology](#) and molecular [medicine](#) is that when proteins operate at the subcellular level, they behave in a certain way as if they're mechanical machinery."

He added that despite the incredulity of colleagues he kept pushing ahead thanks to "the arrogance of youth", freely available US research funding and because he was inspired by the late Nobel Laureate and

biochemist, Arthur Kornberg, who won the 1959 medicine prize for his work on how DNA is assembled.

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