**HIGHLIGHTS**

* TFH lineage commitment is established naturally in mice soon after birth.
* IL21 is functionally expressed at the earliest stages of natural TFH cell development.
* AIRE is required for positive intrathymic selection of natural TFH cells.
* A primary function of FoxP3 Tregs is to prevent the pathological expansion of natural TFH cells.

**eTOC Blurb**

IL21 was thought to be an end-stage product of TFH cells that mature after immunization. We show that IL21 is a functional product of a novel TFH population that develops naturally shortly after birth. These “natural” TFH cells provide insights into how CD4 T cell lineage commitments and immune capabilities are determined.