

Racial / Ethnic Differences in Stress Age Among Women

Dr. Kimberly Fulda continues with her study which delves into the role stress plays in health disparities among women and is currently recruiting subjects that qualify for this important project. Ten subjects, from a total of 105 women; aged 20-40 years of age, have been recruited to complete stress related questionnaires and blood-draw testing.

This study aims to assess whether cortisol / DHEA and cortisol / DHEA-S ratios are associated with high levels of stress as measured by validated self-report questionnaires, and determine if there are racial / ethnic differences in these measures between African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic healthy women.

Differences in health status and disease disparity exist among racial/ethnic groups, particularly in women. While these disparities are not fully understood, one concept suggests that African American women may “age” quicker than Caucasian women due to experiences of lifelong stress and stressful events such as racism and discrimination, resulting in greater morbidity.

This concept of stress age is similar to the weathering effect or allostatic load, which suggests that African-Americans experience negative health consequences at an earlier age. African-American women have been shown to have the highest levels of allostatic load, potentially explaining increased health disparities, such as cardiovascular disease and negative birth outcomes.

Obesity Study Continues

Dr. Susan Franks is currently recruiting subjects to participate in the study of psychophysiological regulation of stress-related eating behavior and food intake following a psychological stress challenge in obese women. Dr. Franks contends that this research will provide a valuable foundation for related research that will lead to the eventual development and testing of evidence-based interventions to effectively promote sustained weight loss and reduce obesity-related diseases.

Obesity has become a world-wide epidemic, yet few advances have been made in understanding obesity as a function of the complex interactions between biological and behavioral factors that regulate appetite and eating behavior. Stress-related eating has been identified as a major problem affecting the weight loss efforts of more than 60% of obese people and may be a key reason why weight loss interventions are largely unsuccessful for a substantial proportion of the target population.

Recent studies have also suggested that stress hormone cortisol may increase the appetite regulating hormone ghrelin, influencing various emotions and behaviors involved in eating and food selection under conditions of stress. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of psychological stress on relationships among cortisol, active ghrelin, psychological states, eating behavior, and food intake in obese women who identify themselves as stress-induced eaters.