Racial Discrimination May Increase Chronic Disease Risk Among Blacks

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Mental and emotional stress from prejudice may create more age-related health issues, such as heart disease and diabetes, among African Americans, according to a study reported by ScienceDaily.

For the study, researchers from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the University of California at San Francisco and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) reviewed research data from 639 participants to estimate both the degree of racial discrimination they had suffered-measured through questions posed to the participants-and their level of red blood cell oxidative stress.

Oxidative stress is the process by which free radicals-molecules responsible for aging and tissue damage-cause cell wear and tear. High oxidative stress has been linked to the aging process and a variety of degenerative illnesses.

Scientists found that more black than white participants reported they'd experienced racial discrimination. What's more, those particular African Americans showed higher oxidative stress levels than others who said they hadn't suffered discrimination.

"Our findings suggest that there may be identifiable cellular pathways by which racial discrimination amplifies cardiovascular and other age-related disease risks," the study authors said. "If increased red blood cell oxidative stress is associated with experiencing racial discrimination in African Americans, this could be one reason why many age-associated chronic diseases have a higher prevalence in this group."

To reduce oxidative stress, the body needs antioxidants, molecules that some studies suggest can suppress free radicals' attack on the body's cells.

Click here for a list of foods high in antioxidants.

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