

Parenting skills tied to reduced inflammation in low-income children

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A new Northwestern University study suggests that an intervention focused on strengthening families can reduce inflammation, a chronic over activation of parts of the immune system that is important for long-term health.

Children of [low socioeconomic status](#) (SES) often experience such inflammation and poorer [health](#) at all stages of life than their more advantaged peers—from lower birth weights at infancy to higher rates of age-related cardiovascular disease and cancer.

"Many health problems in both childhood and adulthood involve excessive inflammation," said Gregory E. Miller, professor of psychology in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. "The process has a role in diabetes, heart disease, allergies and some cancers."

Miller also is a faculty fellow with Cells to Society: The Center on Social Disparities and Health, part of Northwestern's Institute for Policy Research.

He and colleagues studied families in small, rural areas in Georgia. Ninety percent of the families were from low-income backgrounds. The study focused on mothers and each mother's 11-year-old child.

Approximately 170 of the families went through a seven-week training program. The program focused on improving parenting, smoothing communication between parents and [children](#), and helping the children

develop strategies for dealing with stress, racism and peer pressure around sex, drugs and alcohol.

When the children turned 19, researchers collected blood samples to measure the extent of inflammation. The children, now adults, who had participated in the training program had significantly less inflammation than children in the control group. That was the case for six different indicators of inflammation.

"We also found that the training was most successful in reducing inflammation in families who came from the most disadvantaged neighborhoods," Miller said. "The study is also novel in its focus on families who are at high risk for [health problems](#) relative to other Americans."

"A [family](#)-oriented psychosocial intervention reduces [inflammation](#) in low-SES African American youth" will be published July 21 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

More information: A family-oriented psychosocial intervention reduces inflammation in low-SES African American youth, *PNAS*, www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1406578111

Provided by Northwestern University

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