



*A New Way of
Understanding
Health and
Success*

For more information contact:

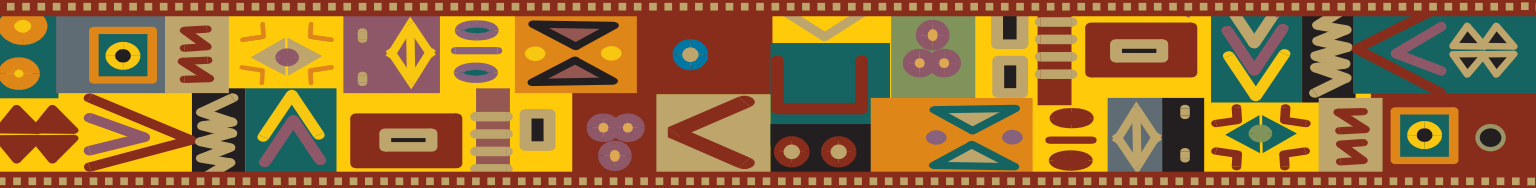
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*in
African
American
Families*

For many, many years people have wondered what makes us who we are. Is it the way our parents raise us? Is it the experiences that life sends our way? Or is it what we each carry inside the cells of our bodies – the unique genetic blueprint we are born with? Most scientists would agree that it is a mixture of how we are made on the inside (our genes) and what we experience on the outside (our environment) that makes us who we are.



Our Research is Changing

Over the years, the research conducted at the Center for Family Research has looked at the kinds of families, schools and communities that foster health and success in African American youth. Now we are collecting genetic as well as environmental information from the families who participate in our research. By looking at the connections between how we are made (our genes) and what we experience (our environment), we hope to better understand why some people are able to succeed in difficult situations.

Why This Research is Important

Scientists have identified all of the genes in the human body. More than 20,000 of them! But many questions remain about how genes work and why they seem to have different effects on our health and behavior under different circumstances. We need to know more about when and how different versions of our genes are affected by the experiences we have – because these experiences (how much stress we experience, whether or not we take good care of our bodies, what kind of relationships we have with friends and family members) influence our health.



Some health problems like hypertension, diabetes and heart disease occur much too frequently in the African American community. The explanation for this may be partially genetic, but it is also related to stress, diet and health care practices. By studying the fit between genes and environment, we may learn how to improve treatments for these illnesses. In fact, we may discover ways in which families and communities actually protect us from developing health problems!

How It Will Help

This new approach to our research will help us understand how and why certain conditions do or do not develop in African Americans – and what we might do to prevent them. We are looking at genes related to (1) health conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease, and (2) emotional and behavioral conditions like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Our findings will help us develop new ideas about how family life, parenting practices and everyday experiences can encourage health and success in African American children and families.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Why collect information about genes?

Information about how genes and life experiences work together to make us who we are has the potential to change our understanding of health and illness. We are particularly interested in health problems that occur frequently among African Americans, like diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. By including a genetic sample with information about attitudes and beliefs, relationships, home and health, we will be able to answer questions about how our experiences may actually protect us from genetic vulnerability to some illnesses!

What does this have to do with me as an African American?

In order to understand how genes work, we must study people whose ancestors come from all parts of the world. It is important, then, to include people of all races in genetic studies. If African Americans are to benefit from this research, we must learn first-hand how their genes and life experiences work together to influence their health. We do not want to assume that how it works for people of one race is how it works for all races.

What will I be asked to do?

Since genes are in every cell of the body, we can get a sample of your genetic information from your saliva. You will be asked to swish some mouthwash around in your mouth for 45 seconds and then spit into an empty container. That saliva will contain cells with a sample of your genes. You will be asked for two mouthwash samples during the field interviewer's visit to your home. This part of the study is completely voluntary.

What will be done with the mouthwash sample?

Your mouthwash sample will be labeled with an identification number rather than your name. It will be stored and analyzed at the Functional Genomics Instrumentation Center on the campus of the University of Georgia. When our study is completed, the sample will be destroyed.

Will my genetic information be available to anyone?

We go to great lengths to keep all of the information that you share with us confidential. This commitment to your privacy will be upheld with your genetic information as well. It will not be shared with any third parties for any reason, including purposes of employment, insurance, paternity or criminal investigation.

What are the benefits to me and my family?

The value of participating comes from contributing to a study about African Americans that may reveal information that will help families like yours in the future.

You will not receive any personal genetic information from our researchers because we are not qualified to make medical diagnoses or to provide genetic counseling.

Will I get paid extra for participating in this part of the study?

You will be paid an additional \$25 for providing the two mouthwash samples.

What if I have questions?

Please call us at the Center for Family Research with any questions you may have. Sherry Lash (888-542-3068) or Dr. Ron Simons (706-542-3232) can answer specific questions about the FACHS study and our genetic collection procedures.