Walking Can Cut in Half the Influence of Weight-Gain Genes

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OK, while it's true some people are "big boned" and have naturally larger, sturdier frames, and some folks are predisposed to pack on pounds because of inherited DNA—scientists have uncovered 32 genes linked to weight-gain—the good news is, recent evidence shows that just one hour each day taking a brisk stroll can reduce the impact of weight-promoting genes by 50 percent, according to a new Harvard School of Public Health study reported by the American Heart Association.

For the study, the Harvard researchers surveyed more than 12,000 women and men who took part in the multiyear Nurses' Health Study and Health Professionals Follow-Up Study. (This study evaluated lifestyle behaviors and health outcomes among doctors and nurses, as well as other health care professionals.)

First, scientists focused on 32 genes previously linked to increased body mass index (BMI), a ratio of weight and height used to determine overweight and obesity. Then the research team determined the number of weight-promoting genes each participant possessed.

In the study, a brisk one-hour daily walk reduced by half the genetic influence toward obesity, measured by differences in BMI, said Qibin Qi, PhD, a research fellow at Harvard and the study's author. But "a sedentary lifestyle marked by watching television four hours a day increased the genetic influence by 50 percent," Qi added.

While the study showed evidence that adding simple physical activity—in this case, walking—to our daily routine can counteract inherited weight-promoting DNA, Qi explained that more research must be done to discover how these individual genes contribute to weight gain.

Click here to read what Queen Latifah had to say about how embracing who you are physically, emotionally and spiritually, leads directly to a better body image.

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