

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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FAMILIES NEEDED FOR DIET-RESPONSIVENESS STUDY

DALLAS — September 23, 1997 — A low-fat, low-cholesterol diet can lower blood cholesterol for most individuals, but for a small percentage of people, dietary change alone cannot make a significant dent in high-blood-cholesterol levels. The answer may lurk in their family tree.

Researchers at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are launching the first clinical investigation into the genetic factors controlling diet responsiveness by placing 100 volunteer families on special diets.

"It is not yet clear why some individuals do not respond to dietary modification," said Dr. Margo Denke, an investigator in the Center for Human Nutrition at UT Southwestern and associate professor of internal medicine. "In this study we want to test whether genes control how our bodies respond to a cholesterol-lowering diet."

If those genes can be identified, individuals who are likely to respond to cholesterol-lowering diets can receive intensive counseling to encourage them to stick with their diets. Proper diet can lower cholesterol as much as drug therapy in some patients.

Denke's previous diet studies of groups of men and post-menopausal women showed marked individual variations in the response to cholesterol-lowering diets. Genetics and a lack of compliance with the diets is thought to be responsible.

The volunteer families will be taught to follow two different well-balanced and

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nutritious diets. One diet will raise cholesterol levels, and the other will lower it. Each diet will be followed for six weeks, and blood samples will be drawn at the end of each period.

By comparing how much cholesterol levels change with the diets and what genes were passed from parent to child, researchers may be able to identify the gene responsible for regulating people's different responses to cholesterol-lowering diets.

Participants will be provided bakery products and spreads at no cost throughout the study. All members of the family will receive a routine physical exam and extensive dietary counseling from a registered dietitian.

To be eligible for the study, a family must consist of two biological parents and two or more children.

"The participation of all family members is what will make this a fun project for the participants," said research technician Angela Dana. "More importantly, they'll learn how to eat a nutritious diet and, hopefully, be motivated to make lifestyle changes that may prevent chronic diseases."

To volunteer for the clinical study, contact Angela Dana at (214) 648-2898.

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