

[IMAGE]

Can Stress Shrink Your Brain?

By Editorial Staff

Is it better to have a bigger brain vs. a smaller brain? The jury is still out, although some research suggests a bigger brain might give you a slight edge in intelligence, although size is by no means the sole variable to consider. However, one thing's for certain: a *shrinking* brain is something to worry about; which leads us to an intriguing study published in *Neurology* that evaluated the impact of stress on brain health.

People who live high-stress lives often have chronically high levels of cortisol, the so-called "stress hormone." According to researchers, high cortisol levels can lead to memory loss and brain shrinkage – and not just when you're old and gray. The study, which evaluated more than 2,000 men and women (average age: 48) with no history of dementia, revealed that high-stress individuals (with high cortisol levels as a consequence) performed worse on memory tests compared to individuals with normal cortisol levels.

Brain MRI scans also revealed high-stress subjects had more brain structural damage to the corona radiata and corpus callosum – areas of the brain that transmit information within the brain and between the two hemispheres, respectively – and a lower percentage of total brain volume compared to normal-stress subjects.

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