Nicotine Addiction: Can Parenting Style Influence the Impact of Genetic Factors?

“Where are you going?” “You’ll need to be home by 9.” “What are your plans for tomorrow?” These are examples of questions and statements parents use to try to monitor the behavior of the teens in their households. As it turns out, parental attempts to monitor behavior may have long-lasting effects on outcomes for their teens.

In a recent study examining the relation between parental supervision and genetic factors, Dr. Laura Beirut and colleagues (Chen et al., 2009) reported that level of parental supervision may moderate the influence of genetic factors that increase the risk of addictive behavior. These researchers studied over 2,000 adults. All had smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetime; 1,032 were considered dependent on nicotine and the rest were not. The researchers completed genetic analyses to determine whether the adults carried specific gene variants that increase risk for nicotine dependence. They also asked the adults a series of questions about the level of parental supervision they received when they were in the 7th or 8th grade.

Results showed that, for adults who were genetically at risk (due to the presence of a specific gene variant) for smoking addiction, low parental supervision during the early teen years increased the risk of addictive smoking in the adults by eight times. For adults with the same variant who reporting higher levels of parental supervision in adolescence, the risk of addictive smoking was only twice as high. The authors suggest that strong parental supervision may be especially important for teens genetically at risk for smoking addiction. Strong supervision is likely to decrease the chances that teens will begin to smoke or become more heavily involved with smoking because opportunities to engage in these behaviors are limited. They also suggest that parental monitoring should be considered as a target for developing prevention strategies.
References:


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