If you’re short or fat, you’ll likely be less educated, have a worse job and earn less than tall people

Researchers aren’t sure what links a person’s height and social status, but point to self-esteem and stigma, among other factors

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Being tall and slender isn’t only aesthetically attractive; a new study shows these physical attributes are also associated with a higher socioeconomic status in developed countries. Being a short man or an overweight woman is associated with reduced life opportunities in areas such as education, occupation and income, concludes the study, published by *The BMJ,* from a team of researchers in Britain and the United States. The scientists analysed genetic variants with known effects on height and body mass index (BMI) from 119,000 individuals aged between 40 and 70 in the UK Biobank – a database of biological information from half a million British adults. Five measures of socioeconomic status were assessed: age completing full time education, degree level education, job class, annual household income, and Townsend deprivation index (a recognised social deprivation score). The results show that being short, as estimated by genetics, leads to lower levels of education, lower job status, and less income, particularly in men, and that higher BMI leads to lower income and greater deprivation in women. A range of factors could link tallness to higher social position, and the researchers suggest the possibilities include complex interactions between self-esteem, stigma, positive discrimination, and increased intelligence.

**New breast cancer genetic mutation found in Chinese population**

A breast cancer mutation in Chinese women has been discovered by Hong Kong researchers, which could lead to better targeted screening for the disease in people from families at high risk of the disease. Researchers at the University of Hong Kong, led by assistant dean and clinical associate professor Dr Ava Kwong Hoi-wai, tested for the RECQL mutation in 1,114 patients selected from the Hong Kong Hereditary Breast Cancer Family Registry. The patients’ family history showed that they were at high risk for breast cancer, but they were all negative for four of the best known breast cancer-causing mutations: BRCA1, BRCA2, TP53 and PTEN. “We decided to test for the RECQL mutation, recently identified as being associated with an increased risk of the disease,” says Kwong, who presented her team’s findings at the 10th European Breast Cancer Conference in Amsterdam. “We found that RECQL was present in 0.54 per cent of the women in our group (Southern Chinese), and we also know that a similar group of Northern Chinese women, from Beijing, had a RECQL incidence of 2 per cent.” This level of incidence means that the RECQL mutation may be an important enough factor to be included in genetic screening for people of Chinese origin with a family history of breast cancer.

Further research was needed, said Kwong, adding: “We hope that our work will enable screening programmes for high-risk women to be better targeted, and also lead to the development of new drugs aimed exclusively at patients carrying specific mutations.”

**Teenaged girls see big drop in chemical exposure with switch in cosmetics**

Just taking a three-day break from certain kinds of make-up, shampoo and lotion can lead to a significant drop in levels of hormone-disrupting chemicals in the body, a study has found. Researchers provided 100 Latina teenagers with personal care products labelled free of chemicals such as phthalates, parabens, triclosan and oxybenzone. The participants’ urine samples were analysed before and after a three-day trial of the lower-chemical products. Metabolites of diethyl phthalate, commonly used in fragrances, decreased 27 per cent by the end of the trial period. Methyl and propyl parabens, used as preservatives in cosmetics, dropped 44 and 45 per cent respectively. Both triclosan, found in antibacterial soaps and some brands of toothpaste, and benzophenone-3 (BP-3), found in some sunscreens under the name oxybenzone, fell 36 per cent. Surprisingly, there was a small increase in concentrations in two less common parabens. Those levels were small and could have been caused by accidental contamination or a substitution not listed on the labels, the study authors say. “Teen girls may be at particular risk [of exposure to these chemicals] since it’s a time of rapid reproductive development, and research has suggested that they use more personal care products per day than the average adult woman,” says study lead author Kim Harley of the University of California, Berkeley.