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## ANALYSIS OF CORTISOL AND DEHYDROEPIANDROSTERONE-SULFATE LEVELS IN MALE NORTHERNERS: THE INFLUENCE OF GENERATION LIVING IN THE NORTH

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**Relevance.** The body's ability to resist the effects of harsh climatic and geographical conditions is determined by characteristics of adaptive mechanisms and the process of their change based on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and depending on the length of residence in the North.

**Purpose.** This study examined male Northerners to assess fluctuations in their cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone-sulfate mean levels in the increasing reliance on the generation of residence in the North.

**Methods.** Seventy male residents of the Magadan Region (mean age  $40.0 \pm 0.8$  yrs) participated in the survey and made up subgroups varying with the length (generation) of residence in the North: the 0th generation ( $n=15$ ), the 1st generation ( $n=35$ ), and the 2nd-3rd generation ( $n=20$ ). Immunochromatographic and immune enzyme analyses were applied in the research.

**Results.** Subjective mean levels of serum cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone-sulfate and their ratio tended to significantly fluctuate based on the generation of residence in the North: the highest values were observed in examinees with the longest period of residence (2nd-3rd generation), and the lowest – in representatives with a shorter period of adaptation to the North extremes (0th generation). In addition, the cortisol concentrations in the evening saliva test were optimized according as we traced them in representatives of 0th to 2nd-3rd generations.

**Conclusion.** The study has resulted in referring serum cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone-sulfate concentrations, their ratio, as well as cortisol concentrations in the evening saliva tests to significant markers that reflect readjustments in the endocrine picture with increasing length of residence in the North, thus confirming the generally recognized role of glucocorticoids in hormonal support of the body adaptation to extreme factors including climatic environments.

**Keywords:** North, middle-aged men, cortisol, DHEA-S, the generation of residence

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**Introduction.** The issue of the mechanisms of newcomers' long-term adaptation to the harsh conditions of the north remains relevant and requires further study. Currently, in addition to the indigenous peoples in the Magadan Region, the permanent residents are made up of quite numerous ethnic groups of Caucasians: migrants and those born to them in the north in different generations [1]. In the course of our long physiological

research, we found that migrants and north-born Caucasians have their own specific characteristics and also much in common in their body functional adaptive readjustments. As we were examining young male adults from Caucasian migrants and those born to migrants in the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> generations, all being residents of the Magadan Region, we identified the main components of the adaptation strategy according as the examinees be-

longed to a particular generation. Those components showed optimization in the studied body functional performance as effectiveness of adaptive changes to the harsh impact of natural and climatic environments and were characteristic of generation-related subjects in the range from 0<sup>th</sup> generation to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations: increased contribution of the parasympathetic component with a fall in the hypertensive focus in the cardiovascular system, reduced total energy costs, and lowered atherogenicity of the lipid picture [1].

It is known that successful adaptation of a human body to extreme climatic and geographical conditions varies with the state of adaptive mechanisms which are based on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA). The structure of adaptive neurohormonal and endocrine reactions is quite plastic and is subject to changes depending on the duration of residence in the northern regions [7, 26]. Cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) are considered valuable markers of the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis [19] with cortisol as the main biomarker of its activity [14] and the hormone that performs to ensure physiological homeostasis and adaptation to stressful situations. However, maintaining high levels of these hormones is energetically inefficient and prevents other physiological processes [32, 29]. Measuring the cortisol level provides important information on a person's capability to adapt to various environmental requirements [17] since its concentration is influenced by psychological and physiological stress factors [28]. To keep the energy balanced when exposed to hormones of the HPA axis, various mechanisms of adaptation of their levels to environmental conditions work at different time scales, i.e. through generations, between parents and their descendants, and during the life of an individual [21]. Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) is mainly present as sulfated ether (DHEA-S); it shows an anti-glucocorticoid effect in vitro and can protect against the side effects of elevated circulating cortisol [19].

We have considered the wide range of physiological effects of the above hormones, as well as the concept of optimization that occurs in the main physiological systems with the increasing duration of residence in the north. Based on this, we defined the aim of the present research as the analysis of saliva and serum cortisol, assessment of the DHEA-S level in the blood as well as the DHEA-S/cortisol ratio in the population of male northerners in reliance on belonging to a particular generation.

**Materials and Methods.** During the scientific monitoring program for northerners entitled "The Arctic. Man. Adaptation" which is being implemented with the "Arktika" Scientific Research Center, the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (the city of Magadan), we have studied the main hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system's indicators in northern men, all being permanent residents of the Magadan Region, and assessed the variables based on different periods of subjective living under the north conditions. The total sample involved 70 men (mean age  $40.0 \pm 0.8$  years) with the following anthropometric indicators: body height –  $180.7 \pm 0.9$  cm, body mass  $87.5 \pm 2.1$  kg, body mass index –  $26.8 \pm 0.6$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>. The examined subjects made up two subgroups based on their generation of living in the north (0 generation (n=15), 1<sup>st</sup> generation (n=35), 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations (n=20). Subjects' venous blood was taken with a vacuum system in the laboratory of Unilab-Khabarovsk LLC. Saliva cortisol (ng/ml) was evaluated twice (morning and evening) using the IFA method on the Multiscan FS immune enzyme analyzer (reader). Dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate (DHEA-S) (ng/ml) and cortisol (nmol/L) in serum were determined by the IHA method using an automatic immunochemiluminescence analyzer of Mindray CL 6000i. The index for DHEA-S (mmol/l) / cortisol (nmol/l) was calculated from the obtained data [6]. The numerical values of the ratio reflect various stages of adaptation (< 1.1 – adaptive reserves are depleted; from 1.1 to 2.1 – adaptive reserves are consumed; > 2.1 – adaptive reserves are preserved). The research protocol was approved by the Local Ethics Committee of the Federal State Budgetary Institution of Science of the Scientific Research Center "Arktika" of the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (conclusion No. 002/021 dated 11/26/2021). The study was performed in accordance with the principles of the Helsinki Declaration (2013). Prior to inclusion in the study, all participants provided their written informed consent. The criterion for inclusion in the study was absence of chronic diseases in the acute stage and complaints about the state of health. All subjects were permanent residents of the Magadan Region living in comparable conditions and having the same mode of physical activity. The following subjective items were monitored: morning activity, caffeine intake, and smoking – factors that can affect morning cortisol and DHEA-S levels. Blood sampling was performed on an empty stomach before

10 a.m. The subjects were instructed to avoid unusual physical activity or stress for 24 hours before the blood tests. Samples of the morning saliva cortisol were taken by the subjects immediately after awakening, the evening saliva cortisol – before going to bed, independently, according to the instructions. Hormone levels in all samples were measured simultaneously to avoid variability among tests.

Statistical data processing was carried out using the standard statistical software package StatSoft Statistica 7.0. Checking for the normality of the distribution of measured variables was carried out based on the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results of parametric processing methods are presented in the form of an average value (M) and an arithmetic mean error ( $\pm m$ ). In multiple comparisons, parametric one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. To identify statistically significant differences between specific groups, a posteriori analysis using the Scheffe test for multiple comparisons was applied. The critical significance level (p) in the work was assumed to be 0.05.

**Results.** Table 1 presents blood serum cortisol and DHEA-S levels, as well as their ratio depending on the generation of residence in the north. The data obtained show raised levels of serum cortisol with the increasing period of residence, from representatives of the 0<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> generations. We can see the average value of the indicators in each group significantly exceeded the upper reference limit typical for residents of the north who had no pathologies (314 nmol/l) [10]. The DHEA-S level assessment revealed optimal concentration of this indicator with its significant growth in the next generations of residence in the north. A similar picture could be seen in the ratio of DHEA-S/cortisol. Based on the classification criteria, men of the 0<sup>th</sup> generation demonstrated the stage of depletion of adaptive reserves whereas subjects of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations tended to preserve the adaptive reserves.

We also analyzed the saliva cortisol levels shown in Table. 2 and found the multidirectional trends in its concentration at different times during the day. We noticed that the content of the morning saliva cortisol remained unchanged with the increasing length of residence in the north, with its average values significantly exceeding the upper reference typical for this indicator, whereas the evening saliva cortisol significantly reduced in the row from representatives of the 0<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations with the approach to the normal range. It is worth mention-

Table 1

Concentration of serum cortisol, DHEA-S and DHEA-S/cortisol ratio depending on the generation of residence in the north

Indicator	Generation			Level of significance of differences		
	0	1	2-3	0-1	1-(2-3)	0-(2-3)
Cortisol, nmol/l	383.6±28.0	397.7±15.3	450.8±23.9	p=0.47	p=0.04	p<0.001
DHEA-S, mcg/dl	275.2±21.9	370±20.4	419.0±23.3	p<0.001	p=0.06	p<0.001
DHEA-S mmol/l	7.47±0.59	10.04±0.55	11.37±0.63	p<0.001	p=0.06	p<0.001
DHEA-S, mmol/l / Cortisol, nmol/l	1.80±0.11	2.37±0.14	2.59±0.18	p<0.001	p=0.17	p<0.001

ing that daily fluctuations in saliva cortisol levels that vary with the generation of residence in the north conditions show the preservation of daily biorhythmology.

**Discussion.** In our study, we observed high blood cortisol levels in northern residents with an increase in mean values from representatives of the 0<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> generations, which indicate the signs of hypercortisolism reported in earlier studies performed in the northern territories [8, 9, 5, 2.]. It is believed that such increased activation of hormones of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis is part of adaptive adjustments to adverse northern conditions aimed at maintaining basal metabolic parameters to compensate for the cold factor [9]. In previous (the 90s of the twentieth century) assessment studies on hormonal status of those living in the north (the Magadan Region) [5], the authors also observed increased blood cortisol concentrations characteristic of new coming people with its significant fluctuations during the first 15 years of living in harsh conditions. Interestingly, no significant differences between migrants and the north born were revealed.

This research has presented cortisol levels that are significantly lower than those obtained earlier [5]: for example, the mean values of serum cortisol in new coming Magadan residents ranged from 489.9±18.8 to 604.8±25.0 nmol/l varying with periods of residence in the north (under 3 years, from 3 to 10 years and more than 10 years), which was significantly higher than in modern residents who migrated to the territory as the 0<sup>th</sup> generation. Similar differences were exhibited by the north born population of the last century in comparison with modern representatives of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation. As we studied modern residents of the Magadan Region, only representatives of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations demonstrated significantly high values of blood cortisol levels. Some authors consider cortisol as the hormone that preserves energy resources and ensures long-term reactions to stimuli of various etiologies [32]. Following on from that, we can see raised cortisol concentration with longer resi-

Table 2

Concentration of saliva cortisol depending on the generation of residence in the north

	Generation			Level of significance of differences		
	0	1	2-3	0-1	1-2	0-(2-3)
Morning	42.9±3.1	44.0±2.6	41.0±4.1	p=0.39	p=0.27	p=0.57
Evening	11.8±1.2	10.4±1.3	8.3±0.9	p=0.21	p=0.09	p<0.01

dence in the north as a normal reaction to acute stressors to maintain survival functions. [23, 32].

For the first time in the Magadan Region, the saliva cortisol level in men was suggested a predictor of the intensified functional reserves, and its daily biorhythmology was assessed as an informative factor on the imbalance which occurs in chronobiological rhythms owing to the specific light periodicity of our region. Saliva cortisol level has long been used as a marker of stress system activity and often assumed to quantify the effects of "biological stress" [20]. However, tracking cortisol daily curves – peak values 30 minutes after awakening and decreasing values to a nighttime minimum – is obviously more valuable than single-point levels, which is necessary to identify characteristics of the HPA function [15].

Currently, the fact that a daily cortisol level comes down by the evening time is considered as a fairly informative biomarker of inhibition of feedback in the HPA axis caused by cortisol, whereas its level upon awakening shows the sensitivity of adrenal receptors and their reactivity to the effects of adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) [20]. The data in Table 2 confirm rather high mean values of the subjective morning saliva cortisol concentration through all the examined groups, which prove to not change in any reliance on a generation of residence in the north, thereby demonstrating the link to the increasing sensitivity of adrenal receptors.

Circadian fluctuations in cortisol, usually measured as the difference between the cortisol level at awakening and before bedtime, as well as cortisol reactivity to

stress factors, are associated with the body health condition [11]. The smaller the difference between morning-evening cortisol levels, the worse the physical and mental health indicators [18]. The lowest variables of the difference were exhibited by the 0<sup>th</sup> generation men.

On the whole, the comparison study on the morning and evening saliva cortisol indicated that each examined group (0<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations) kept the circadian rhythm staying unchanged, despite the cortisol hypersecretion in the morning saliva test. The smallest cortisol levels in the evening sample were typical for men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations, thereby showing an optimization of sensitivity to inhibition of the feedback of the HPA axis in men characterized by the longest residing experience in the northern conditions. The HPA axis performing activity is known to aim at relieving the adaptation of behavior over time, using past experience to prepare for expected challenges by changing system control points, shifting regulatory control and programming behavioral tendencies [25], as well as keeping hormonal levels within the safe limits by suppressing feedback [31, 24], which conforms with the evening cortisol test results in the examined men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations.

It is believed that the universal mechanism of adaptation is the switching of steroidogenesis in the adrenal glands from the production of glucocorticoids to the secretion of androgens, in particular, DHEA-S [4] in order to provide a functional balance of catabolic and anabolic vectors of exchange; they are the stages of adaptive response [3]. The anti-stress mechanisms of DHEA-S include changes



in the metabolism of cortisol to its inactive metabolite cortisone, the resulting ratio of which redistributes energy and restores homeostasis [22]. In this research, the DHEA-S secretion tended to grow up in the increasing reliance on the period of the north residence, from the 0<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations, which was probably a response to the raised blood cortisol concentration depending on the generation.

DHEA-S and cortisol have different and often antagonistic effects on each other [13] since these two hormones jointly regulate each other and their joint increase or imbalance determine the total effect on tissues; therefore the DHEA-S/cortisol ratio must be given emphasis in addition to absolute concentrations of both steroids [27]. The emphasis necessity is also backed up by the concept of anabolic balance which takes into account the ratio of anabolic and catabolic hormones and may indicate a susceptibility to diseases associated with stress and aging [13]. Nowadays, the ratio of the sulfated metabolite of DHEA and cortisol is used as an indicator of catabolic/anabolic balance [33]. High values of the ratio suggest an optimal anabolic balance, whereas low values are associated with chronic stress and declining health [33], with mortality [16], dementia [12], metabolic syndrome [16], and decrease in immunity after physical stress [30].

It is worth emphasizing the ratio of cortisol-DHEA as a key marker of human resistance to stress, because for adequate protection against stress, DHEA that works as a protector for the central nervous system must always prevail over cortisol which has a destructive effect on the hippocampus [22]. Calculation and interpretation of the DHEA-S/cortisol index based on the levels of the two antagonist hormones in the blood serum varying with the length of residence in the north, have revealed that the 0<sup>th</sup> generation experience tension in the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal glands system, and the value of this index shows the expenditure of adaptive reserves whereas the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> generations exhibit the optimization of this system and keep their adaptive reserves.

**Conclusion.** Serum cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate, their ratio, as well as evening saliva cortisol test have proved to be significant markers that reflect readjustments in a person's endocrine profile with the increasing length of residence in the north, which confirms the generally approved role of glucocorticoids in human adaptation to severe factors including climate extremes. This

study has found pronounced tendency of activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis in northern men who develop excessive cortisol production, report high mean values of DHEA-S and the ratio of DHEA-S/cortisol growing with the next generations of residence in the north. The numerical values of the DHEA-S/cortisol ratio indicate the stage of depletion of adaptive reserves experienced by male subjects of the 0<sup>th</sup> generation whereas representatives of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations tend to keep their adaptive reserves. In the process of adaptation to continuously unfavourable factors of the north, the cortisol hyperproduction promotes increased catabolic reactions that grow more intense with longer periods of adaptation. At the same time, powerful restorative anabolic processes are activated owing to the driving effect of DHEA-S in the population of northern men. This phenomenon requires further research for better understanding. It is worthy of note that the values of the DHEA-S/cortisol ratio growing from the representatives of the 0<sup>th</sup> generation to residents with longer residing experience in the north agree with the early identified optimization in physiological performance showing a strong link to the next generations, which allows us to consider the DHEA-S/cortisol indicator as a new criterion for the degree of adaptability.

For the first time, the assessment study on morning and evening saliva cortisol levels has been conducted in northern residents. Despite the morning cortisol hypersecretion, the subjective circadian rhythm in each examined group remained unchanged, which was observed along with a significant fall in the evening cortisol level in men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations. That was caused by the pronounced sensitivity of adrenal receptors in the entire population and the changes for optimization of sensitivity to inhibiting the feedback of the HPA axis in men who experienced the longest residing in the north conditions.

Thus, adaptive adjustments to the living conditions of the north develop with the activation of the pituitary-adrenal cortex system and vary with the generation depending on the duration of residence in harsh climate conditions and weather extremes.

We have considered all other equal things and concluded that analysis of the DHEA-S/cortisol ratio indicator can be valuable since its variables identify specific adaptation readjustments that northerners report in the increasing reliance on their duration of residence in severe

climatic and natural conditions. In general, this ratio serves as a marker of the degree of adaptation, as well as a highly informative criterion when selecting volunteers to work in extreme living conditions in the Arctic regions.

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## SCIENTIFIC REVIEWS

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## ACUTE ENDOTHELIAL CELL INJURY IN CARDIAC SURGERY PATIENTS UNDER ARTIFICIAL BLOOD CIRCULATION: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PROBLEM

This study summarizes the existing literature data on endothelial damage and its etiology, pathophysiology, and diagnosis in patients undergoing cardiac surgery with cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB). Data on endothelial dysfunction and the history of its study were obtained from various medical databases, including PubMed, Cochrane, Elibrary, and Cyberleninka. We suggest that endothelial injury that occurs during and after the surgery predicts poor clinical outcomes, and should therefore be considered by anesthesiologists, intensivists, cardiac surgeons, and transfusion medicine specialists.

**Keywords:** endothelium, endothelial dysfunction, cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB), endothelial glycocalyx (eGCX).

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**Introduction.** Numerous studies conducted in recent decades have demonstrated the crucial role of endothelium in physiological and pathological processes in the body. The endothelium constant-

ly counteracts the effects of damaging factors and produces multiple biologically active substances thus preventing negative impacts of these factors on the vascular wall and regulating its functions.