

## Why it's probably not the stress that's shrinking your brain

A new study shows that people with higher levels of the “stress hormone” tend to have smaller brains — but that doesn’t mean one causes the other.

The study, published [October 24] in the [journal Neurology](#), reports smaller brain volumes and worse memories in people with higher-than-average levels of cortisol — popularly known as the stress hormone. But any [media coverage that warns stress](#) is going to shrink your brain is premature.

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[A] team of researchers led by [Sudha] Seshadri and [Justin Echouffo-Tcheugui](#), an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University, looked at the entire brain in more than 2,000 apparently healthy people.

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The researchers took blood samples from study participants to measure their cortisol levels, and tested their memory, reasoning, and attention. The researchers also imaged the study participants’ brains to look for differences in brain volumes.

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The participants fell into three different groups with cortisol levels at the low, medium, and high ends of normal. And the researchers found that the people with the highest cortisol levels tended to have poorer memories and attention, and smaller brain volumes.

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[Neuroscientist Bruce] McEwen hopes that the team will continue to dig into why some people had higher cortisol levels than others, and what else might be affecting their brains — and the researchers hinted at plans to do so.

**Read full, original post:** [Don't stress out yet about stress shrinking your brain](#)