Release No. 44
Mexico City, September 14th, 2025

IPN Scientists Investigate Link Between Obesity and Vitiligo

- **Preventing obesity is considered important to reduce one of the risk factors and increase the chances of controlling the disease**
- **Psychologists apply cognitive-behavioral therapy to help patients regulate their emotions and limit the disease to keep it stable**

Researchers at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN), in collaboration with specialists from the Centro Dermatológico "Dr. Ladislao de la Pascua" of the Ministry of Health, are conducting a study that has found evidence suggesting that central obesity in women (accumulation of fat in the abdominal area) may be a risk factor in triggering vitiligo. This autoimmune disease, characterized by skin depigmentation, is more common among women.

The head of the research, Dr. Ismael Vásquez Moctezuma from the IPN's Escuela Superior de Medicina (ESM), explained that the metabolic alteration caused by excess abdominal fat—which leads to a subtle but chronic inflammation known as metainflammation—may trigger vitiligo. He therefore emphasized the importance of preventing obesity to reduce risk factors and increase the likelihood of controlling the disease.

This study is aligned with preventive medicine initiatives promoted by President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo and supported by the Secretary of Public Education, Mario Delgado Carrillo.

Initially, the project aimed to assess whether mesenchymal stem cells could be an alternative for repigmentation. However, it shifted focus after the research team observed a connection between vitiligo and central obesity in some of the patients treated by Dr. Martha Morales Sánchez, a collaborator from the Centro Dermatológico "Dr. Ladislao de la Pascua."

To provide comprehensive care, the project also incorporated Ana María Balboa Verduzco, clinical psychologist and Master of Science at the ESM, who explained that most

people with vitiligo experience low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety due to depigmentation—especially in visible areas of the body.

Balboa Verduzco noted that these conditions contribute to accelerating the disease, as they promote autoimmunity. For this reason, treatments led by Dr. Morales Sánchez have been complemented with cognitive-behavioral therapy and techniques that help patients regulate their emotions, allowing the disease to remain stable and improving their quality of life.

She highlighted that psychological intervention helps patients break the vicious cycle that begins with anxiety or stress crises, which often lead to overeating and, as a consequence, central obesity. This condition accelerates the appearance of the characteristic white patches, caused by the immune system's destruction of melanocytes—the cells responsible for skin pigmentation.

The clinical psychologist recommended that individuals who present the first signs of vitiligo seek psychological support to develop emotional regulation skills, cognitive restructuring, and assertiveness. These strategies can help slow the progression of the disease and improve quality of life.

Dr. Vásquez Moctezuma stressed that research on vitiligo must be approached comprehensively; therefore, the participation of other specialists, such as nutritionists, will be sought to contribute to obesity prevention. Looking ahead, the team also plans to incorporate artificial intelligence tools capable of analyzing photographs of lesions to enable early diagnosis and timely treatment.

As a result of this project, an article will soon be published in a prestigious international scientific journal, reporting the statistical evaluation of patients' body weight, duration of the disease, type and morphology of lesions, and the prevalence of vitiligo among women.

For more information, visit, www.ipn.mx

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