



University of California, San Francisco
Northwestern University
New York University

MASALA PULSE

The Official Newsletter of the MASALA Study
<http://www.masalastudy.org>

Message from the Study Investigators!

Dear MASALA study participant:

We hope that 2024 has greeted you with good health. We express our heartfelt appreciation for your invaluable contribution to our ongoing research.

Our dedicated MASALA team has been hard at work conducting clinical exams in both San Francisco and Chicago, engaging with nearly 700 participants already. However, our pursuit of knowledge doesn't end there – we aspire to reach a total of 900 participants by the end of this summer, and your involvement is crucial to achieving this ambitious goal.

If it has been more than two years since your last MASALA visit, we invite you to take an active role in shaping the future of South Asian health. A quick call to schedule your exam (UCSF: 415-23-MASALA, Northwestern University: 872-256-2155) is all it takes to make a significant impact.

We understand that life may have taken you away from our study centers, but distance should not be a barrier. We are committed to assisting with travel costs, ensuring that you can conveniently complete your exam and contribute to the groundbreaking research we are conducting.

MASALA is a pioneering study in the United States, providing long-term data on South Asians with the ultimate aim of providing insights that can help prevent heart disease. Over the past decade, your participation has enabled us to uncover distinctive characteristics of South Asians compared to other U.S. groups.

Here are some of the **key study findings**. South Asians have:

- Higher rates of diabetes and high blood pressure
- High lipoprotein(a) levels, a genetically determined type of cholesterol

- Men have high coronary artery calcium (CAC) levels, but women have similar levels to other women
- More fat deposited in critical areas (liver and muscle), posing risks for diabetes and heart disease
- Lower muscle mass
- A relatively lower body weight but higher levels of fat in the body
- Surprisingly low exercise levels, even among those with higher education and income
- 40% are vegetarian, but a vegetarian diet is not necessarily healthy. Half of the vegetarians are eating foods that are fried or high in fat and sugar rather than healthier fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes

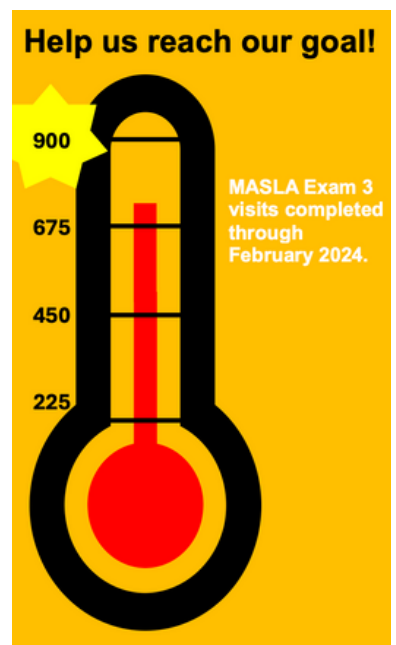
You can read more details on our website:
www.masalastudy.org

Your involvement has directly contributed to improving healthcare for South Asian Americans. We've implemented changes in diabetes screening, identified candidates for statin treatments, and highlighted specific risk factors pertinent to South Asians – all thanks to your dedicated participation.

As we delve deeper into understanding the aging process among South Asians, your continued participation is invaluable. Together, we can make a lasting impact on the health of our community.

With sincere gratitude,

Drs. Alka Kanaya and
Namratha Kandula



Team Spotlight: B'joe Mammoottil



I am a Research Study Coordinator for the MASALA (Exam 3) cohort study and MASALA 2nd Generation (MASALA-2G) study at Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois.

I graduated with an M.Sc. degree from M.S. University of Baroda, Gujarat, India in 1999. After graduating I started my research Journey as a Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India Fellow at the Cardiac Care Center, SRMC&RI in Chennai. After completing the fellowship as a Junior and later Senior Research Fellow, I joined the Biochemistry Dept. at SRMC&RI, Chennai as a junior faculty.

After arriving in the United States in 2006, I had the opportunity to train and work at the Biochemical Genetics laboratory at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, NY.

I joined the MASALA Study in December of 2021 and love the opportunity to contribute to the science that can lead to a better understanding of South Asian heart health. I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting many MASALA participants who have come to the exam 3 clinical visits and am excited to meet the rest.

When I am not working, I enjoy spending time with my family and friends. I also enjoy the various attractions of downtown Chicago like the museums and parks that are fun for the whole family.

The MASALA 2nd Generation (MASALA-2G) study needs your help!

Young adulthood is an important time to maintain good heart health, especially for South Asians. **The MASALA-2G (2nd Generation) study is for adults age 18+ years, who are the children of original MASALA study participants!** The MASALA-2G study **has reached 50% enrollment**, and now needs your help to achieve goal participation!

Encourage your adult children to join the MASALA program before the 2nd generation program closes! MASALA-2G participants complete heart health related blood tests, a vital signs check, and a heart CT scan, and receive a copy of all results. Currently, this program is available only at the Chicago MASALA site for now. We hope to expand to the San Francisco and New York sites in the future!

How can your children participate?

1. They can submit the MASALA-2G entry form at www.MASALA2G.org/join
2. Send their name, phone number, and email address to us at MASALA2G@northwestern.edu
3. Siblings are eligible - if one child has participated, their siblings may also join!

More information is at www.MASALA2G.org. The MASALA-2G program is led by Dr. Nilay Shah, Cardiologist and Assistant Professor at Northwestern University in Chicago.

Team Spotlight: Richa Jain



Hello! My name is Richa Jain. I earned my M.B.B.S. from RNT Medical College, Udaipur. I practiced medicine for 10 years before relocating to the US. Currently, I am a Clinical Research Coordinator at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) MASALA site. I firmly believe in the potential to prevent most diseases.

I have been involved with the MASALA study since 2016, and joining MASALA allowed me to pursue my interest in working with the South Asian community, and engaging in participant interactions during clinical visits. MASALA, as the first longitudinal study for South Asians, aligns with my goal of giving back to the community.

Beyond my role as a clinical research coordinator at UCSF, I engage in pursuits that contribute to my personal well-being and balance. Meditation serves as a cornerstone, fostering a sense of calm amid our stressful, busy lifestyle. Quality time with family and friends is equally essential for rejuvenation and resilience. I enjoy spending time with my family, reading, and listening to music.

The Links Between our Mental Health and Heart Health

By Mahika Nayak, medical student at UCSF

Many South Asians believe in a holistic model of health where physical health is connected to mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Our research, using data from the MASALA study, shows a strong connection between mental health and cardiovascular risk factors.

In the MASALA study, we found that among men, feeling more anxious or depressed was linked to greater thickness of the common carotid artery in the neck, which can indicate a higher chance of stroke or heart problems. For South Asian women, higher stress levels were tied to greater carotid artery thickness.

The connections between mental health symptoms and cardiovascular risk may be through behaviors, such as less physical activity, less healthy eating, or poor sleep. Worse mental health can also have a direct impact on the body's stress hormones and inflammation, leading to high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity, which in turn can alter the blood vessels in the heart and brain. Our study findings support the idea that our mental and emotional well-being is connected to



our heart health.

Taking care of our mental health can also benefit our heart. The MASALA team also found that having strong social connections is linked to better heart health.

If you often feel sad, worried, or lonely, it's important to talk to someone about it, whether it's a friend, family member, or health professional. Spending time every day doing things that make you happy or help you feel calm can also help. Caring for our minds and bodies can lead to better heart health in the long run.

UCSF, Northwestern University, and New York University
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- **Please call us if you have a major change in your health status.** If you were recently in the hospital, if you underwent a serious outpatient medical test, or have any new diagnoses.
- **Please call us if you have a new address, phone number, or email address.**
- **Please take part in our phone interviews.** If we leave a message for you, please call us back. We need to update your information each year.
- We sometimes send you forms asking you to give MASALA permission to collect your medical records from hospitals and doctors' offices. **Please return these forms quickly**, so we can get the records.

To contact the:

UCSF clinic, call (415) 236-2725

Northwestern clinic, call (872) 256-2155



Join us for a MASALA Study
Virtual Town Hall presented by
Dr. Kanaya and Dr. Kandula

Sunday, April 28, 2024

3pm San Francisco time

5pm Chicago time

Come to hear some of the new findings from our study!

To register:

- Scan the QR Code
- Call/email the Study Coordinator



[For study news, events, and publications:](#)



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