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**The Concept**

The concept of allostatic load originates from the idea that the internal physiologic milieu adapts to environmental demands – a phenomenon referred to as *Allostasis*. Allostasis is a dynamic regulatory process, with continuous adaptation of physiology in response to stressors. However, when adaptation efforts are excessive, in terms of frequency, duration, and/or extent, it can lead to gradual loss of the body's ability to maintain system parameters within normal operating ranges. Allostatic load is the total accumulation of such dysregulation across physiological systems, and was hypothesized to mediate the effects of stress on health risks. There is now good evidence that psychosocial adversity is associated with higher levels of dysregulation in multiple physiological systems, or higher allostatic load. Higher allostatic load (or larger number of systems that are dysregulated) is in turn, associated with poorer health outcomes.

**Potential Use in Clinical Care**

In addition to the research role of allostatic load in understanding the mechanisms by which psychosocial influences on health risks play out, allostatic load can also be potentially used as a measure of total sub-clinical change in physiology, to assess risk for adverse outcomes. In young adults, it could be an early warning sign of health risks accumulating beneath the surface, which should trigger changes in health behaviors. Markers of sub-clinical changes are especially important in older adults: Many older men and women experience gradual declines in physical and cognitive abilities in the absence of a clinically manifest disease process, and sub-clinical measures such as allostatic load can identify the older adults at increased risk for such declines, and target appropriate interventions.