



Health & Fitness Weekly Wellness Message

February is American Heart Month and it is also a time that we honor the contributions African Americans have made to our great country through Black History Month celebrations. In honor of Black History Month, we want to highlight some of the major health concerns amongst the African American community to help increase awareness and to provide steps on how you can lessen your overall health risks. Despite all of the medical advances in the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular disease (CVD), chronic illness and death from CVD is higher in African Americans than among White, Hispanic, and Asian Americans. Although African American adults are 40% more likely to have high blood pressure, they are 10% less likely than their non-Hispanic White counterparts to have their blood pressure under control. Here are just a few facts about African Americans and Heart Disease from the Center for African American Health:

- Heart disease and stroke are the No. 1 and No. 3 leading causes of death.
- Cardiovascular diseases claim the lives of over 104,000 each year.
- These diseases account for 33% of all deaths among African Americans in the United States.

It's important to know your risk factors because the more risk factors you have, the greater your chance of having a heart attack or stroke. Some risk factors can be changed or treated. Others can not. Those you can not change include increasing age, family history and race. Now, let's focus on what you **CAN** do to lessen your overall risk:

- 1. Don't use tobacco** -- Smoking is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Smoking raises your blood pressure and makes the heart work harder to maintain blood flow.
- 2. Know your numbers** -- have your blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked regularly to ensure that they are in a healthy range. Not sure of what your blood pressure is? Stop by Health Fitness anytime from 0700-1600 to check your blood pressure.
- 3. Practice healthy eating** -- Eat well-balanced meals that are low in fat and cholesterol and include several daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Make sure you eat regular meals throughout the day so takeout or fast food looks less tempting in the evening.

4. Physical Inactivity – Exercise is not only a great tool to help improve your heart and lung health; it can also help improve your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Aim for at least 30 minutes a day to help prevent chronic diseases. If you need to, divide the period into shorter timeframes of at least 10 minutes each. We can help you get moving through our Pedometer Program. Stop by Health Fitness to sign up! We can also help you set up an exercise program.

5. Being Overweight – Extra pounds can negatively impact your blood pressure and your cholesterol levels. To check your Body Mass Index (BMI), click on the following link: <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bminojs.htm>

To download an educational booklet for African Americans on heart healthy living, click on the following link: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/chdblack/index.htm>

Family reunions are fun and give relatives plenty of time to talk about old times, honor ancestors, sample favorite family recipes, and enjoy being together. And while the family is together, it's also a great time to talk about family health. Check out the following site for a free guide that helps get the conversation started – you can download the guide or order a free hard copy: <http://www.nkdep.nih.gov/familyreunion/guide.htm>

Prepare your favorite African American dishes in ways that protect you and your family from heart disease and stroke. This cookbook provides recipes for 26 tested and tasty favorite African American dishes.

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/chdblack/cooking.pdf>

To find other information on topic related to African American health; or to sign up to receive African American health email updates, click on the following link:

<http://health.nih.gov/topic/AfricanAmericanHealth>

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