



ACT

For Your Heart

A Guide to Heart Health
for the Black Community

If you are Black, you may be at greater risk for heart disease.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for adults in the United States. If you are Black, you and your family members may have an even greater chance of getting heart disease.

At every age, Black men and Black women are more likely to have a heart attack or die from heart disease than White men or White women.

Other health conditions can lead to heart disease.

Some of the most common conditions among the Black community that increase risk for heart disease are:

High blood pressure (hypertension)

All US Adults

Male **52%** Female **43%**

Non-Hispanic Black Adults

Male **58%** Female **58%**

Obesity

All US Adults

Male **40%** Female **41%**

Non-Hispanic Black Adults

Male **38%** Female **55%**

Diabetes (high blood sugar)

All US Adults

Male **12%** Female **9%**

Non-Hispanic Black Adults

Male **13%** Female **13%**

Percentage of US adults aged 20 years and older

Unequal social factors can take a toll on your heart. Some include:



Experiences of discrimination



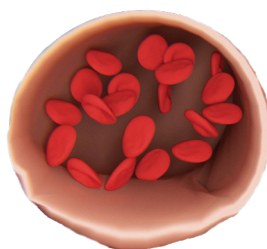
Differences in education and income



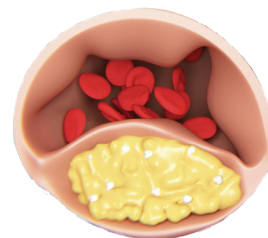
Access to fresh foods and healthcare

What is heart disease?

“Heart disease” is often used to refer to coronary artery disease (CAD), the most common form of heart disease. It’s caused when fatty deposits narrow the arteries that supply blood to the heart. **CAD can cause heart attacks and sudden death**, but there are things you can do that can help lower your risk.



Healthy artery



Artery developing fatty deposits

Heart disease often affects Black adults at younger ages.

According to the CDC, **Black adults 18 to 49 years of age are 2 times more likely to die from heart disease than White adults at the same age.**



A.C.T. now for your heart health:

A: AWARENESS

Be aware that you may have a higher chance of getting heart disease if you are Black.

C: COUNTERACT

According to the CDC, **small steps toward a healthy lifestyle** can help lower your chances of getting heart disease or conditions that cause it.

T: TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

If you think you may be at risk for heart disease, talk to your doctor. **They may suggest lifestyle changes** to manage conditions or a test to check your heart.

A: AWARENESS

Understand the Problem

3 heart health risk factors affect the Black community in high numbers.



High Blood Pressure (hypertension)

About **3 of 5 Black adults** 20 years of age and older have high blood pressure.



High blood pressure can damage artery walls. This may help fatty deposits build up and eventually cause heart disease or a heart attack.



Obesity (a BMI of 30 kg/m² or more)

BMI = body mass index.

More than half of all Black women 20 years of age and older are obese. This is the highest of any group. And nearly **2 in every 5 Black men** over the age of 20 years are obese.

4 of 5 people with heart disease are overweight or obese.



Being obese, or even overweight, can cause or worsen high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.



Diabetes (high blood sugar)

About **1 in every 8 Black adults** 20 years of age and older has been diagnosed with type 1 or type 2 diabetes.



High blood sugar can:

- Damage the blood vessels and nerves in the heart
- Narrow arteries
- Make it easier for abnormal blood clots to form

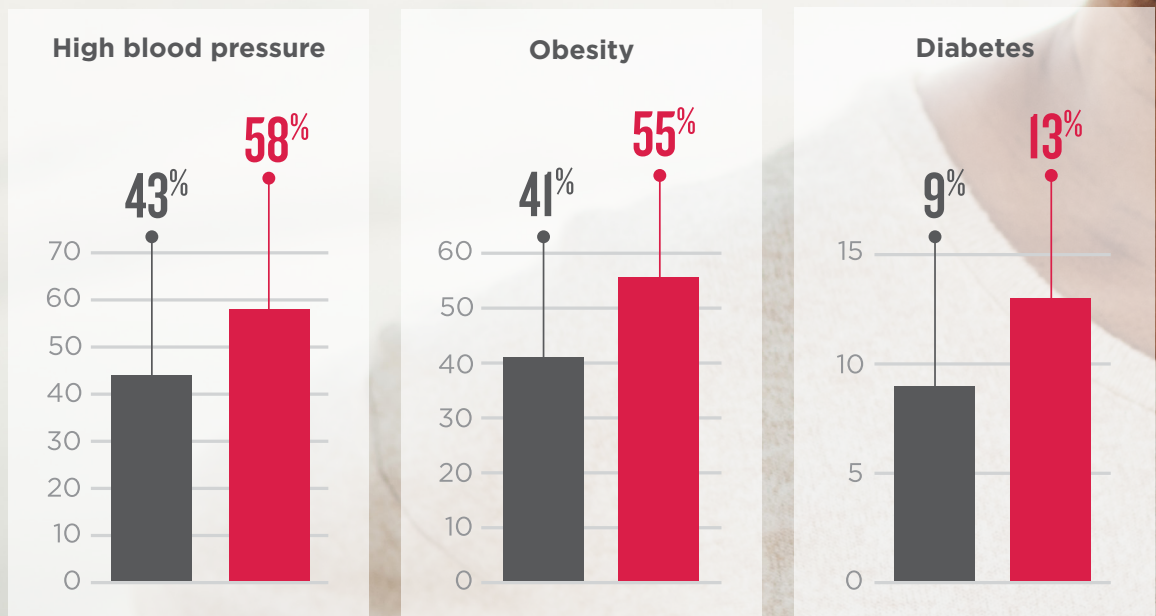
Having diabetes makes you **2x more likely** to get heart disease.

These blood vessel problems can lead to heart attack, stroke, or death.

Black women and heart disease

Among women of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States, Black women are the most likely to have heart disease. **About 3 of every 5 Black women** 20 years of age and older have a disease of the heart or blood vessels.^a

Black women also have some of the highest rates of high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes. Notice how they compare to all women in the United States.



Percentage of US adults aged 20 years and older

All women 
Black women 

^aThese include heart disease, heart failure, stroke, and high blood pressure.

C: COUNTERACT

Healthy Habits That Can Help Lower Your Risk

According to the CDC, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, and risk factors such as high cholesterol, smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity can harm the heart. **Making healthier lifestyle choices today** may help prevent heart disease and related problems in the future.



Diet

Eating fresh foods, lean proteins, and less salt can be healthier for your heart

What you eat can influence heart health. The American Heart Association recommends following the **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet**. It's a diet that stresses vegetables, fruit, whole grains, lean proteins, and less salt.

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The DASH Diet

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) created the **DASH diet** to help manage blood pressure. It is a diet that supports heart health in many ways.

[Click to learn more about the DASH diet at the NHLBI website.](#)



Outdoors

Spending more time outside may support heart health

Spending time outside may:

- **Lower** your blood pressure
- **Decrease** your chances of getting type 2 diabetes or dying from heart disease
- **Help** you be more physically active
- **Help** you feel more like exercising

Sunlight can help the body get into a day-night rhythm, which may:

- **Lead** to more restful sleep
 - **Help** the way the heart and blood vessels work together
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Stepping Toward Health

A study found that taking about **4,400 steps a day** was better than about 2,700 at lowering death rates in older women. The healthy effects increased with every step up to about 7,500 steps a day (about 3¾ miles).

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Small steps in these 4 areas may help move you in the right direction to lower your chance of getting heart disease. It is important to talk with your doctor about a plan to help support your heart health.



Exercise

Getting more physical activity can help reduce risk factors for heart disease

Regular exercise can help:

- **Lower** blood pressure, blood sugar, and inflammation^a
- **Improve** how the heart and blood vessels work together
- **Burn** calories so you lose or maintain weight

Talk with a doctor before beginning a new exercise routine. This is even more important for people who have conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart problems.

^aInflammation is swelling related to injury. Inflammation helps the body heal, but having it for a long time can cause disease.

How Much Exercise Is Enough?

The CDC recommends that adults get **at least 2½ hours of moderate intensity exercise** and 2 or more days of muscle strengthening activities each week.



Rest

Spending enough time sleeping and relaxing is important for heart health

Lack of sleep has been linked to heart disease. The CDC recommends that most adults get **at least 7 hours of sleep each night**.

Sleep is good for the heart because it may:

- **Lower** your blood pressure while asleep
- **Help** your brain control hunger. Lack of sleep can cause you to gain weight.
- **Lower** your blood sugar

Relax With Deep Breathing

Relaxation is also an important part of lowering stress. Try relaxing by breathing slowly and deeply in a way that fully fills your stomach.

T: TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR



It is important to talk with your doctor about your risk for heart disease. Having **an annual well visit** can help detect high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol early. Managing risk factors like these may lower your chance of getting heart disease.

See your doctor right away if you have:

- Chest pain that comes and goes with stress
- Shortness of breath
- A new decreased ability to exercise
- Heart disease risk factors

Your doctor may recommend an imaging test to check your heart. It is important for heart disease to be treated as early as possible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about lowering your risk for heart disease, check out these resources.



Educational Resources From the Association of Black Cardiologists

Resources from a group of heart experts seeking to erase health disparities.



On the Move to Better Heart Health for African Americans

A publication from the NHLBI about lowering risk for heart disease.



DASH Eating Plan: Healthy Eating Proven Results

A publication from the NHLBI about the DASH diet.



Mind Your Heart

This website provides information about heart disease and heart-healthy living.