

State of African-American Health

by Chris Dixon, M.Ed.

Women:

- African American women have the highest rates of being overweight or obese compared to other groups in the U.S. About four out of five African American women are overweight or obese. (1)
- In 2015, African American women were 60 percent more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic white women. (1)
- African American women are 1.6 times more likely (60 percent more likely) than non-Hispanic white women to have high blood pressure. (2)

Men:

- African American men are twice as likely to have a stroke as their white adult counterparts. Further, black men are 60 percent more likely to die from a stroke than their white adult counterparts. (3)
- Percent of men aged 20 and over with obesity: 37.5% (2013-2016) (4)
- Percent of men aged 20 and over with hypertension (measured high blood pressure and/or taking antihypertensive medication): 40.5% (2013-2016) (4)
- African American men are 60% more likely to have liver and IBD cancer than non-Hispanic white men. (5)

Youth:

- In 2011-2014, African American girls were 50% more likely to be overweight than non-Hispanic white girls. (1)
- Type 1 diabetic African American youths had a prevalence of about 20% obesity, whereas about 80% of type 2 diabetics were obese. (6)

Physical Activity:

- In 2015, African Americans were 20% less likely to engage in active physical activity as Non-Hispanic whites. (1)

Heart Disease:

- Deaths rates from heart disease and stroke are higher for African Americans as compared to whites. (1)

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Diabetes:

- African American adults are 80 percent more likely than non-Hispanic white adults to have been diagnosed with diabetes by a physician. (7)
- In 2013, African Americans were twice as likely as non-Hispanic Whites to die from diabetes. (7)

African-American health is a complex topic. The above statistics paint a picture that lead me to believe the state of African-American health in the United States is in critical condition. These statistics provide some objective data for analyzing health in our community. Though there are numerous reasons why African-American health is in this state (*slavery, Jim crow, educational attainment, socioeconomics, political and environmental policies, etc.*) it is well beyond the scope of this blog to hypothesize on the causes of the current condition. Instead, the purpose of this blog is two-fold: First, to educate those who may not understand the current health status of African-Americans. Second and most important, to create dialogue around recommendations that can lead to better health outcomes.

African-Americans have made strides in education, business and other aspects of American life in the last several decades. Statistically, there is

still much work to be done in the arena of health. Below are my recommendations to improve health in the African-American community. Though this is not an exhaustive list, my hope is these ideas we lead to a greater conversation.

- Develop a National Health Agenda: The state of African-American health is one of emergency. Being in an emergency state requires us to develop a plan of action. I call on leaders in the African-American community, local, state and federal agencies (NAACP, National Urban League, Office of Minority Health, etc.) to develop a national health agenda for African-Americans. This action plan should clearly define goals/recommendations to improve our current state of health. In addition, specific guidelines regarding physical

activity, nutrition and disease prevention should be included.

- Be models of health: Good leadership involves being a model. In short, we must *“practice what we preach”* when teaching the next generation about health. It’s important we not only talk to our kids about being physically active and improving health, we must be good role models of these behaviors as well.
- Educate ourselves: Take time to educate yourself about personal health. This means participating in regular physicals, health screenings, and preventative health care. Many of our ancestors did not have the opportunity to be educated on proper health maintenance. Our generation must take this opportunity to develop and practice healthy behaviors to decrease the risks

and prevalence of diseases that impact us at disproportionate rates.

This African-American History Month my hope is individuals of all ethnic backgrounds will celebrate the contributions of African-Americans in this country. I celebrate my ancestors each day by taking advantage of opportunities created by their selfless determination and effort to improve the lives of the next generation. Making the choice to be healthy is a celebration of life. You want to be healthy for your children and grandchildren. Similar to our ancestors, the health decisions we make today will impact future generations. Make sure you are promoting healthy behaviors to change the trajectory of our history and help the next generation live healthier lives. It starts with US.



1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=25>
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=19>
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=28>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/black-health.htm>
5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=17>
6. Mayer-Davis EJ, Beyer J, Bell RA, et al. Diabetes in African American youth. *Diabetes Care*. 2009;32(supplement 2):S112–S122.
7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=18>

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