

February 2020 E-Newsletter: Black History Month and Health Awareness

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February is full of observances including Valentine’s Day, President’s Day, Kite Flying Day, Make a Friend day, Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Random Acts of Kindness week. February is most known as Black History Month and American Heart Month. This month is full of awareness and celebration. Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing the central role of blacks in U.S. history. Also known as African American History Month, the event grew out of “Negro History Week,” the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Other countries around the world, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also devote a month to celebrating black history.

It’s no secret February is all about hearts — but not just the candy kind. American Heart Month, focuses on keeping families and communities free from heart disease, the No. 1 killer of Americans. The first proclamation was issued by President Lyndon B. Johnson in February 1964, nine years after he had a heart attack. Since then, the president has annually declared February

American Heart Month.



It is no coincidence that both Black History and Heart disease are celebrated in the same month. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer for all Americans, and stroke is also a leading cause of death. As frightening as those statistics are the risks of getting those diseases are even higher for African-Americans. The good news is, African-Americans can improve their odds of preventing and beating these diseases by understanding the risks and taking simple steps to address them. High blood pressure, obesity and diabetes are the most common conditions that increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. Here's how they affect African-Americans and some tips to lower your risk.

The prevalence of high blood pressure in African-Americans is the highest in the world, it is more severe than in non African-Americans and develops earlier in life. Also known as hypertension, high blood pressure increases your risk of heart disease and stroke, and it can cause permanent damage to the heart before you even notice any symptoms, which is why it is called the “silent killer”. Research suggests African-Americans may carry a gene that makes them more salt sensitive, increasing the risk of high blood pressure. Your healthcare provider can help you find the right medication, and lifestyle

changes can also have a big impact. If you know your blood pressure is high, keeping track of changes is important.



African-Americans are disproportionately affected by obesity. Among non-Hispanic blacks age 20 and older, 63 percent of men and 77 percent of women are overweight or obese. There are many reasons for these rates, but can be prevented with diet changes and exercise.

African-Americans are more likely to have diabetes than non-Hispanic whites. Diabetes is treatable and preventable. but many people don't recognize early warning signs. Many people associate the disease with older relatives who were diagnosed too late or had poorly-controlled diabetes and suffered preventable complications such as blindness, amputations, or renal failure.

Prevention of heart disease include

- Obtain and maintain a healthy weight*
- Healthy diet that starts with increasing vegetables, fruit, lean meats and fish. Decreasing red meat, fried foods and sodium.*
- Exercise- increasing heart rate for 30 min three times a week.*
- Maintain healthy blood sugar levels.*
- Get regular checkups to monitor blood pressure, blood sugar, and weight.*

As healthcare providers we need to be aware of these differences and help educate, advocate and care for our African-American patients. More information can be found at American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, Go Red for Women and Nationalcalendaraday.com.

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