



## Stress and the heart health of African Americans

### Purpose of the study

African Americans have the highest death rates from heart disease. The good news is that most of these deaths can be prevented by living healthy lives. The American Heart Association has a new way to fight heart disease, called Life's Simple 7, which includes four measures of good heart health: normal blood pressure, normal blood sugar, normal cholesterol, and normal body weight. It also includes three healthy behaviors: eating a heart-healthy diet, getting regular exercise, and not smoking.

African Americans experience high levels of stress, which may impact their ability to achieve the best heart health. Researchers studied African Americans in the Jackson Heart Study to find out whether stress affected the participants' ability to reach the heart-healthy goals of Life's Simple 7.

### Major findings

- Participants did not meet the ideal Life's Simple 7 goals on three factors: healthy diet, normal weight and regular exercise.
- Women reported higher levels of stress that occurs on a daily basis, over one's lifetime and combinations of multiple stressors than men.
- High stress limited the ability of men and women to have the overall best heart health.
- Those who reported high levels of stress were less likely to quit smoking.
- Those who reported high levels of stress were less likely to have normal blood sugar levels.

### Take away message

Stress affects a person's ability to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Healthcare providers (including doctors, nurses and public health workers) should monitor how stress affects their patients' heart health. They must also connect patients with community resources that are helpful in reducing stress and promoting heart health.



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