



# Cardiovascular health among African Americans

## Purpose of the study

African Americans have the highest rates and deaths from heart disease. People who maintain 4 positive health factors (normal blood pressure, normal blood sugar, normal cholesterol, and normal body weight) and 3 lifestyle behaviors (eating a healthy diet, regular exercise, and not smoking) decrease their chances of getting heart disease. These health and lifestyle factors were classified as poor, intermediate and ideal. This study measured the proportion and changes in these conditions among African Americans in the Jackson Heart Study.

## Major findings

Neither men nor women had ideal levels on all 7 health and lifestyle factors. One in five men and women had at least 4 ideal health conditions. At visit 1, only 1 percent of participants had ideal or healthy diets, less than 1 in 5 participants had ideal physical activity, and under 14 percent had ideal (or normal) body weight. There was a slight improvement in adherence to ideal physical activity recommendations between visit 1 and visit 3. However, the proportion of participants meeting ideal levels for cholesterol, blood sugar and BMI declined from visit 1 to visit 3.

## Take away message

Although African Americans are exercising more, they are not maintaining healthy diets and normal cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure and body weight over time. These are areas public policy and health care providers should focus on for reducing the burden of CVD among African Americans in the JHS.

Seven steps to cardiovascular health:

**Eat healthy.** Eat more fruits, vegetables, lean meats or seafood, and nuts without salt. Eat less fats, added sugars, and salt.

**Get active.** Get more exercise, like brisk walking - 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.

**Stop Smoking.** Tobacco quitline 1-800-QUITNOW

**Lose weight or keep a healthy weight.** Lose around 5% to 7% of your bodyweight, 10 to 14 pounds for a 200 pound person. ([www.cdc.gov/diabetes/basics/prediabetes.html](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/basics/prediabetes.html))

**Control cholesterol.**

**Lower blood sugar.**

**Manage blood pressure.**



**Citation:** Djousse L, Petrone AB, Blackshear C, Griswold M, Harman JL, Clark CR, Talegawkar S, Hickson DA, Gaziano JM, Dubbert PM, Correa A, Tucker KL, Taylor HA. Prevalence and changes over time of ideal cardiovascular health metrics among African-Americans: the Jackson Heart Study. *Prev Med.* 2015;74:111-116. PMID: 25712326.