



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NEGRO WOMEN, INC.

Tomorrow Begins Today: African American Women As We Age

While the overwhelming majority of African American women describe their health as “good” or “excellent” over 80 percent of African American women experience high rates of obesity, overweight, hypertension, cancers, diabetes, and higher mortality than their white counterparts. African American women also experience undiagnosed, untreated psychological illnesses that impact their physical health. We all know the importance of good health, however, cultural positioning of African American women as caretakers may influence African American women to delay seeking medical care when it is needed.

Facts About African American Women and Health

- Over 80 percent of African American women report having health insurance, but that insurance is generally obtained through an employer and dependent upon uninterrupted employment.
- Untreated depression can have serious consequences for physical health, but the good news is that depression is treatable.
- Many African American women lead physically sedentary lifestyles which can contribute to higher rates of obesity, diabetes, cholesterol, heart disease, and other conditions.
- Heart disease is the number one killer of African American women. Lowering cholesterol and eliminating hypertension can help prevent heart disease.
- Some studies show that walking briskly for even two to three hours a week (20 to 30 minutes a day) can decrease the chances of heart attack or stroke, diabetes, or even premature death.
- From 2000 to 2003, HIV/AIDS rates for African American women were 19 times the rates for white females and 5 times the rates for Hispanic females.

Healthy Steps that African American Women Can Make

- **Get moving!** Exercise is the best weapon against age-related diseases and disability. Incorporate physical activity in your daily life and make exercise a part of every day.
- **Eat right!** Make wiser food choices. Nutrition experts recommend that adult women eat nine servings of fruits and vegetables daily, avoid foods high in saturated fats and select whole grains over foods made from refined flour and sugars.
- **Check it out!** Get regular medical check ups with both your general physician and your OB-GYN. Monitor your blood pressure and cholesterol with home tests and practice breast self-examination in between doctors' visits so that you can be aware of any changes that may need professional attention. Begin routine mammogram or colorectal testing when your doctor recommends it.
- **Get tested!** Know your HIV status for your peace of mind and practice safer sex. Although abstinence is the only sure way to prevent becoming infected with HIV through sexual transmission, using latex condoms can greatly reduce your risk of contracting HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases.
- **Talk about it!** Seek psychological counseling if you need it. There is no shame in therapy. Depression is a serious disease and is also linked with other serious physical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension.
- **Cover your assets!** Review your health insurance coverage to be sure that it meets your needs. Consider purchasing supplemental health and disability insurance that is not connected with your job if possible, so that it is available to you even if you lose your job.