**How to use drop-in article:**

Copy and paste this prewritten drop-in article into your newsletters, bulletins, blogs, or website. Or send it to your local media and ask them to do a story for American Heart Month. Add your organization’s logos, images, or graphics to personalize them. (Please note: These articles are provided for educational purposes and should not be distributed as press releases or contain the NHLBI or *The Heart Truth®* logos without permission.)

# Bringing Better Heart Health to the African American Community

February is American Heart Month! Did you know heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States but impacts some communities disproportionately? Health problems that increase the risk of heart disease are common in African American communities, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and being overweight. Having multiple risk factors increases the risk of heart disease. But the good news is that there’s a lot we can do to prevent it.

**Did you know?**

**African American women 20 years and older:** 81% are overweight, 58% have high blood pressure, 30% have high cholesterol, and 13% have been diagnosed with diabetes.

**African American men 20 years and older:** 72% are overweight, 57% have high blood pressure, 28% have high cholesterol, and 12% have been diagnosed with diabetes.

## **Connecting with Others is Good for Your Heart**

People with close relationships at home, work, or in their community tend to be healthier and live longer. One reason, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), is that we’re more successful at meeting our health goals when we work on them with others. Feeling connected and having positive, close relationships with others benefits our overall health, including our blood pressure and weight. Having people in our lives who motivate and care for us helps, as do feelings of closeness and companionship.

Help raise awareness about heart health among those you care about. Have conversations about heart health so they can better understand their risk factors for heart disease and take actionable steps to prevent or reduce them.

## **Lifestyle Tips**

Here are some facts, how-to tips, and resources to inspire you and your community to work together to a live heart-healthy lifestyle.

* Be more physically active.
* Maintain a healthy weight.
* Eat a nutritious diet.
* Quit smoking.
* Reduce stress.
* Get 7-9 hours of quality sleep.
* Track your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar numbers.

You don’t have to make big changes all at once. Small steps will get you where you want to go. Here are some ways to get started.

## **Move More**

Invite family, friends, colleagues, or members of your community to join you in your efforts to be more [physically active](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/physical-activity-and-your-heart):

* Ask a colleague to walk “with you” regularly, put the date on both your calendars, and text or call to make sure you both get out for the walk.
* Get a friend or family member to sign up for the same online exercise class, such as a dance class. Make it a regular date.
* Grab your kids, put on music, and do jumping jacks, skip rope, or dance in your living room or yard.

**How much is enough?** Aim for at least 2½ hours of physical activity eachweek — that’s just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. In addition, do muscle-strengthening exercises 2 days a week. Can’t carve out a lot of time in your day? Try doing 10 minutes of physical activity at least 3 times a day. NHLBI’s [Move More](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/move-more-making-physical-activity-routine) Fact Sheet has ideas to get and keep you moving.

## **Aim for a Healthy Weight**

Find someone in your friend group, at work, or in your family who also wants to reach or maintain a healthy weight. (If you’re overweight, even a small weight loss of 5–10% helps your health.) Check in with them regularly to stay motivated. Agree to do healthy activities, like walking or cooking a healthy meal, at the same time, even if you can’t be together. Share low-calorie, low-sodium recipes. Check out NHLBI’s [Are You at Healthy Weight?](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/are-you-healthy-weight-fact-sheet) fact sheet.

## **Eat Heart-Healthy**

We tend to eat like our friends and family, so ask others close to you to join in your effort to eat healthier. Together, follow the [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan) eating plan. Research shows that, compared to a typical American diet, it lowers high blood pressure and improves cholesterol levels. Find delicious recipes at NHLBI’s [Heart-Healthy Eating](https://healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov/) webpage.

## **Quit Smoking**

To help you quit, ask others for support, or join an online support group. Research shows that people are much more likely to quit if their spouse, friend, or sibling does. Social support online can help you quit. All states have quit lines with trained counselors — call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). You’ll find many free resources to help you quit, such as apps, a motivational text service, and a chat line at [BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov](https://betobaccofree.hhs.gov/) and [Smokefree.gov](https://smokefree.gov/).

If you need extra motivation to quit, consider those around you: Breathing other people’s smoke, called secondhand smoke, is dangerous. Many adult nonsmokers die of stroke, heart disease, and lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke.

## **Manage Stress**

Managing stress helps your heart health. Set goals with a friend or family member to do a relaxing activity every day, like walking, yoga, or meditation, or participate in an online stress-management program together. Physical activity also helps reduce stress. Talk to a qualified mental health provider or someone else you trust.

## **Improve Sleep**

Sleeping 7-9 hours a night helps to improve heart health. De-stressing will help you sleep, as does getting a 30-minute daily dose of sunlight. Take a walk instead of a late afternoon nap! Family members and friends: remind each other to turn off the screen and stick to a regular bedtime. Instead of looking at your phone or the TV before bed, relax by listening to music, reading, or taking a bath.

## **Track your Heart Health Numbers, Together**

Keeping a log of your blood pressure, weight goals, physical activity, and, if you have diabetes, your blood sugar will help you stay on a heart-healthy track. Ask your friends or family to join you in the effort. Check out NHLBI’s [My Heart Health Tracker](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/my-heart-health-tracker).

**Visit** [www.hearttruth.gov](http://www.hearttruth.gov/) for more information about heart health.