Cardiovascular Disease in African Americans

Cardiovascular disease includes diseases of the heart and the blood vessels. Stroke, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, atherosclerosis, and congenital heart defects are forms of cardiovascular disease. In adults, cardiovascular disease often begins with atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. This comes from the result of fatty buildup in the blood vessels. Cardiovascular disease claims the lives of over 100,000 African Americans each year.

Know the Facts

- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death of African Americans in the United States. Four out of 10 African American adults have some form of cardiovascular disease.

- Almost 40% of African Americans adults have high blood pressure. Genetics for sensitivity to salt may increase the risk for high blood pressure in African Americans.

- There are higher death rates in African Americans from cardiovascular disease when risk factors, such as high blood pressure, tobacco use, and obesity are not controlled. Getting help early can reverse the effects of cardiovascular disease.
Risk Factors for Cardiovascular Disease:
Risk factors are traits and lifestyle habits that increase a person's chances of having cardiovascular disease. Some risk factors cannot be changed or controlled, such as heredity.

Risk factors you can change:
- Blood pressure: High blood pressure increases the work of the heart.
- Tobacco use: Nicotine narrows blood vessels, which can lead to high blood pressure.
- Cholesterol level: High cholesterol increases the amount of fatty buildup in your arteries that causes atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries.
- Obesity: Being overweight increases your risk for heart disease.
- Physical activity: Being inactive increases your chances of being overweight.
- Diabetes: High blood sugar increases the rate of atherosclerosis and raises your risk of heart attacks.
- Stress: Abnormal or high stress can put you at greater risk for high blood pressure and other heart disease.

Risk factors you cannot change:
- Heredity, especially if someone in your family has had a heart attack before the age of 50.
- Age and gender. Males develop heart and vascular diseases at an earlier age than females. For both men and women, the risk of developing cardiovascular disease increases as they get older.

Actions to Take to Change Your Risk Factors:
- Have your blood pressure checked at least once a year, and more often if you know you are at risk. If you have high blood pressure, follow your treatment plan. Your health care team may suggest changes in your diet, order medicine, and give you a plan for exercise.
• Have your cholesterol tested once a year. Reduce the amount of fats and cholesterol in your diet by eating fewer fried and fatty foods, like ribs, sausage, fried potatoes, and bacon.

• Stop smoking.

• If you have diabetes, check your blood sugar levels at home and try to keep them as close to normal as possible.

• Take all medicines as ordered by your doctor. If you have side effects from the medicine, talk to your doctor before you stop taking it or make a change in the dose.

• Exercise at least 3 times a week for 20 minutes. Check with your health care team before starting an exercise program.

• Learn how to relax and manage stress.

The more risk factors that you have, the greater your chances are for developing cardiovascular disease. Controlling your risk factors will slow the disease and help prevent future problems. If you have more questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.