

**Black Clergy Health Brief: A Resource for Pastors**  
Provided by Health Committee of The Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity  
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**DID YOU KNOW**

- Heart disease is the **leading cause of death** for men, women, and people of most racial and ethnic groups in the United States.<sup>1</sup>
- Cardiovascular Diseases cause 1 in 3 deaths in women each year – more than all cancers *combined*.<sup>2</sup>
- Based on 2015 to 2018 data, among **Black adults** 20 years of age and older, 60.1% of males and 58.8% of females had cardiovascular disease of some form.<sup>3</sup>
- **Philadelphians** are dying early from cardiovascular disease more rapidly than the residents of any other major city in the United States.<sup>4</sup>
- **Philadelphia** has one of the highest hypertension prevalence rates in the nation and has one of the highest rates of uncontrolled hypertension in the United States.<sup>5</sup>
- According to a 2019 report, within Philadelphia, **Black adults** reporting significantly higher rates of high blood pressure compared white adults (48% vs. 29%)<sup>6</sup>.
- Black women are nearly 60 percent more likely to have high blood pressure than white women.<sup>7</sup>

**What Types of Disease Affect the heart?<sup>8</sup>**

- **Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)** is the term for all types of diseases that affect the heart or blood vessels, including coronary heart disease (clogged arteries), heart attacks, strokes, congenital heart defects and peripheral artery disease.
- **Heart Disease** is a type of CVD that describes a variety of conditions that affect the heart's structure and function including heart attacks and congenital disease.
- **Coronary Heart Disease** (clogged arteries) is a type of heart disease that occurs when plaque (a combination of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in the blood) builds up in the arteries near the heart.

**Contributors to CVD**

- **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE:** Too much pressure on the walls of blood vessels can cause damage to the blood vessels. Damaged blood vessels create a risk of plaque buildup inside the vessels, which can lead to clots, strokes and heart attacks.<sup>9</sup>
- **HIGH CHOLESTEROL:** Too much cholesterol in the blood can build up on the walls of blood vessels, limiting blood flow and making the heart work too hard. High cholesterol can also lead to clots, strokes and heart attacks.<sup>10</sup>

**RISK FACTORS<sup>11</sup>**

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inactivity/Sedentary Lifestyle</li><li>• Being Overweight or Obese</li><li>• Diet – High Cholesterol &amp; Salt</li><li>• Smoking</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diabetes</li><li>• Abnormal Heart Rhythm</li><li>• Stress</li></ul> |
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**PERSONAL CHOICES THAT SUPPORT HEART HEALTH<sup>12</sup>**

- **Diet:**
  - Eat a diet rich in vegetables and fruits
  - Choose whole grain foods and low-fat dairy products
  - Drink more water. Set a goal to drink half of your body weight in ounces.
  - Eat more fish (preferably those containing omega-3 fatty acids like salmon, trout, or tuna at least twice a week).
  - **READ LABELS.** Look for lower fat (0 trans-fats) and lower sodium options.

- **Diet (continued):**
  - Reduce intake of simple sugars (soda, candy, sugary desserts).
  - Limit or eliminate added salt. Try other spice options.
- **Exercise:** Begin daily exercise routine, one activity at a time. Select something that you can stick with. Try to do thirty minutes of moderate or fifteen minutes of vigorous exercise, five days per week.
- **Reduce Weight:** To lose weight, you must take in less calories than you use.
- Get your **blood pressure** under control. If on medication, BE CONSISTENT.
- Get your **cholesterol level** checked regularly.
- **Smoking:** Pick a day to quit and get support from family and health providers. Avoid secondhand smoke.

### HOW CAN THE BLACK CHURCH FOSTER HEART HEALTH?

- Encourage regular BLOOD PRESSURE CHECKING.
- Provide rides for parishioners to medical appointments.
- Do a “Let’s Move Moment” during church: Have someone lead the congregation in some simple movements during the worship experience.
- Start a Heart Health Campaign where the parishioners set diet and exercise goals together. (e.g., a 90 Day Challenge, etc.)
- Sponsor healthy cooking demonstrations to give parishioners menu ideas.
- Always provide healthy food options during church meals. (Fruits, whole grain breads, non-fried meats.)
- Start an Aerobic Exercise Ministry (physical or virtual) or plan a monthly activity for the church that involves aerobic exercise.
- Teach on Meditation and Prayer for the relief of anxiety.
- Encourage Mindfulness to reduce stress – Model breathing exercises and meditation.
- Distribute Heart Health materials in the community.
- Sponsor health fairs that include blood pressure screenings.
- Start a support group for those who want to quit smoking (members and non-members).

***“Keep your HEART with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23)***

**Disclaimer: The contents of this document are for informational purposes only and not intended to be a substitute for medical advice or guidance. Please consult your primary care provider or licensed health care practitioner for all health and medical advice.**

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Underlying Cause of Death, 1999–2018. CDC WONDER Online Database. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2018. Accessed March 12, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.goredforwomen.org/en/about-heart-disease-in-women>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.heart.org/-/media/PHD-Files-2/Science-News/2/2022-Heart-and-Stroke-Stat-Update/2022-Stat-Update-At-a-Glance.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.heart.org/en/affiliates/pennsylvania/philadelphia>

<sup>5</sup> Olives C, Myerson R, Mokdad AH, Murray CJ, Lim SS. Prevalence, awareness, treatment, and control of hypertension in United States counties, 2001-2009. PLoS One 2013;8:e60308 Published online April 5, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.phila.gov/media/20190516102711/chart-v4e4.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> CDC 2020. Hypertension Prevalence and Control Among Adults: United States, 2017–2018. NCHS Data Brief, No. 364. Figure 4.

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/media/docs/Fact\\_Sheet\\_Know\\_Diff\\_Design.508\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/media/docs/Fact_Sheet_Know_Diff_Design.508_pdf.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/hypertension-high-blood-pressure/guide/atherosclerosis#091e9c5e80008f08-1-1>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/Health-Topics/Answers-by-Heart/Cholesterol-Levels-Affect-Risk.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/risk\\_factors.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/risk_factors.htm)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/infographic/hearthealth.htm>