

# How Diet Affects African-American Men's Health

## SUMMARY

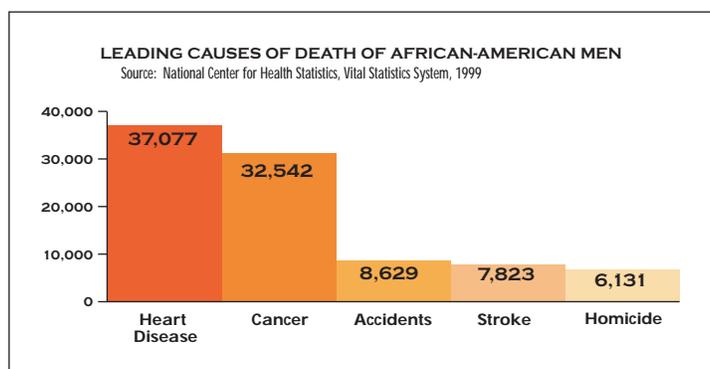
African-American men have a greater chance of developing or dying from many chronic diseases, including certain cancers, diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure, than their Latino, Caucasian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American brothers. Lifestyle factors such as poor diet and lack of physical activity contribute to their increased risk of disease.

The link between eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and decreasing the risk of disease is well established. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that, in America, at least 300,000 deaths each year are associated with poor nutrition and lack of physical activity. According to the CDC, improving dietary habits to include more fruits and vegetables could reduce the incidence of some chronic diseases. The National 5 A Day For Better Health Program recommends that all Americans eat 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day to promote health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

The good news is that fruit and vegetable consumption has gone up in the United States.

Yet, the most recent estimates show that consumption of fruits and vegetables is declining among African-American men. Indeed, data show that African-American men aged 35 to 50 eat only 3.5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, approximately one-third of the 9 servings recommended for men by national health authorities. Moreover, only 14 percent of African Americans are even aware of the recommendation to eat at least 5 servings a day. Black men eat fewer fruits and vegetables than any other group. In focus groups, African-American participants were less likely than other population groups to make a connection between fruit and vegetable consumption and reduced risk for disease, particularly cancer. Interestingly, African Americans were more likely to believe health messages about diet if they were related to hypertension and diabetes, and if they included clear messages about which specific foods are best to eat to prevent those diseases.

Because African-American men experience a disproportionate burden of diet-related chronic diseases, the National 5 A Day For Better Health Program is launching a campaign to encourage black men to eat 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day. This summary provides background information about the important link between eating fruits and vegetables and the health of black men.



National Cancer Institute  
5 A Day For Better Health Program  
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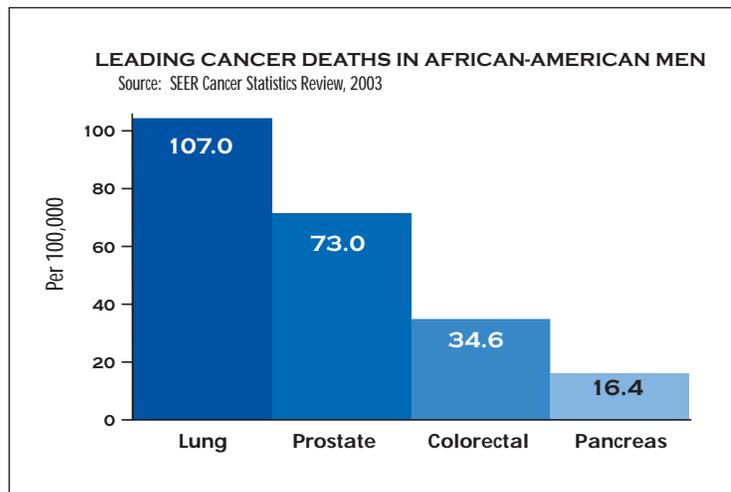
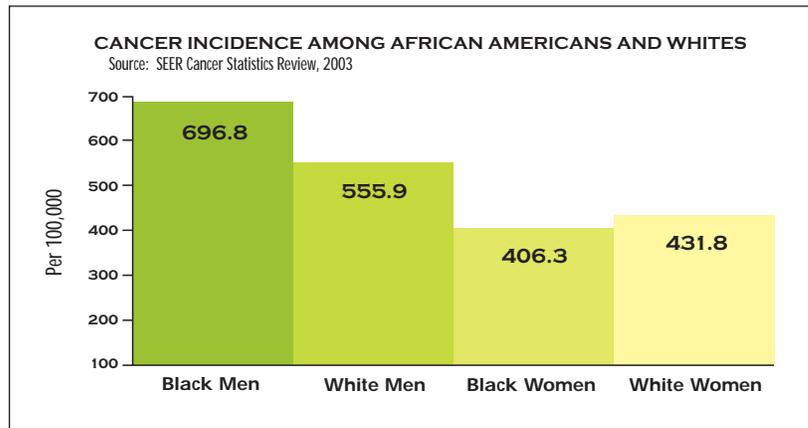
## DIET-RELATED CHRONIC DISEASES THAT DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT AFRICAN AMERICANS

### Cancer

The African-American community has higher overall rates of newly diagnosed cancers and deaths from cancer than any other racial or ethnic group. Compared to white men, African-American men are disproportionately affected by cancers of the lung, prostate, colon, rectum, and pancreas, among other sites.

- African-American men are 1.4 times more likely than white men to die from cancer.
- Overall, people whose diets are rich in fruits and vegetables have a lower risk of getting cancers of the lung, mouth, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, colon, and rectum. They are also less likely to get cancers of the breast, pancreas, larynx, and bladder.
- A growing body of evidence supports a role for diet in reducing incidence (rates of newly diagnosed cancer) and mortality (death rates) for some other cancers. For example, new research suggests that diets rich in cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts) and lycopene-rich foods (tomato sauce, tomato paste) may reduce the risk of prostate cancer.

Scientists estimate that as many as 50 to 70 percent of cancer deaths in the United States are caused by human behaviors such as smoking and dietary choices. Some important steps in preventing cancer include maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active, avoiding tobacco use, and eating a low-fat diet that is high in fruits and vegetables.



## Heart Disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for African-American men. Despite recent declines in heart disease death rates in the general population, the disparity between African Americans and whites has increased.

- Heart disease killed more than 725,000 Americans in 1999.
- The mortality rate of heart disease for African-American men aged 35 to 44 years is more than twice that for white men.

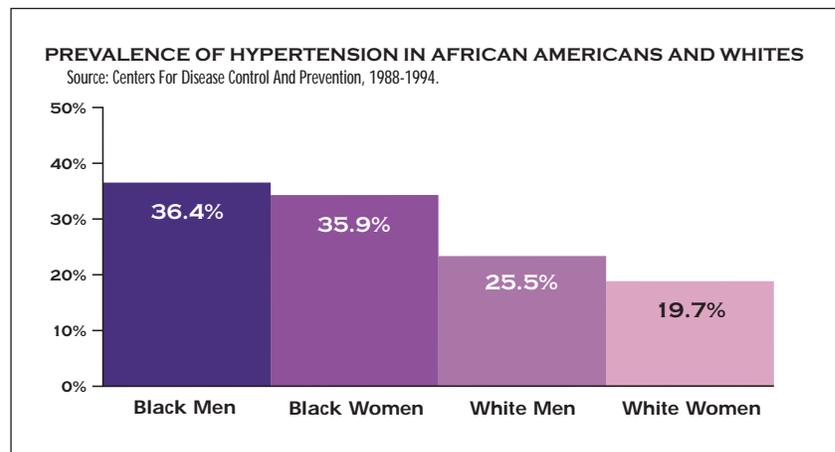
Risk factors for heart disease include poor nutrition (a diet high in fat and low in fruits and vegetables), lack of physical activity, smoking, being overweight or obese, and having diabetes or high blood pressure. African Americans have the highest rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity, and have the lowest consumption of fruits and vegetables, placing many of them at a markedly increased risk for heart disease.

## High Blood Pressure

African Americans have the highest rate of high blood pressure in the world.

- Hypertension affects 1 of every 3 African Americans.
- 36.4 percent of black men aged 20 and older have high blood pressure, compared to 25.5 percent of white men.
- Black men develop hypertension at an earlier age than white men.
- African Americans are more likely to experience hypertension complications and are less likely to receive treatment than whites.

Risk factors for hypertension include poor diet, tobacco use, obesity, diabetes, and lack of physical activity. Significant improvements in controlling blood pressure have been achieved through diet modification to include more fruits and vegetables. In the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) trial sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, African-American men who adopted a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and low in fat had even greater reductions in blood pressure than white men who did the same.



## Diabetes

Diabetes mellitus is one of the most serious health challenges facing the African-American community.

- 2.8 million African Americans have diabetes.
- For every 6 whites with diabetes, 10 African Americans have the disease.
- Diabetes contributes to many health problems — including heart disease, kidney failure, leg and foot amputations, and blindness — that often result in disability and death. African Americans with diabetes are more likely to develop these complications and experience greater disability from them than whites.
- African Americans have a 27 percent higher mortality rate from diabetes than whites.

Risk factors for diabetes include poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and obesity. Findings from the CDC's Diabetes Prevention Program showed that a healthy diet, which includes fruits and vegetables, and exercise can reduce the risk for developing diabetes in high-risk populations.

## Obesity

Over 60 percent of adults in the United States are overweight or obese, and African Americans are disproportionately affected. Excess weight from fat increases the chance of developing many health problems, including cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.

- In 1998, 22.8 percent of African-American men were obese and 43.2 percent were overweight.
- Obese people (Body Mass Index 30 and above) have a 50 to 100 percent increased risk of death from all causes, compared with normal-weight people (Body Mass Index 18.5 – 24.9).

Risk factors for obesity include physical inactivity and a diet that is high in calories and fat. Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories and high in fiber and water. Research suggests that people with higher fruit and vegetable intakes tend to eat fewer calories overall and have better weight control.



## EAT 5 TO 9 SERVINGS OF FRUITS & VEGETABLES A DAY FOR BETTER HEALTH

Researchers are beginning to unravel the mystery of why fruits and vegetables are able to help fight disease and protect health. Vitamin A, vitamin C, fiber, and thousands of phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables are thought to play a part in helping to reduce the risk for disease. While the exact mechanisms of specific phytochemicals are being studied, one thing is clear: the different colors of fruits and vegetables—green, red, yellow/orange, blue/purple, and white—all contain a unique array of disease-fighting phytochemicals that work together with vitamins and minerals to protect our health. Here are just a few examples of the phytochemicals found in different colored fruits and vegetables:

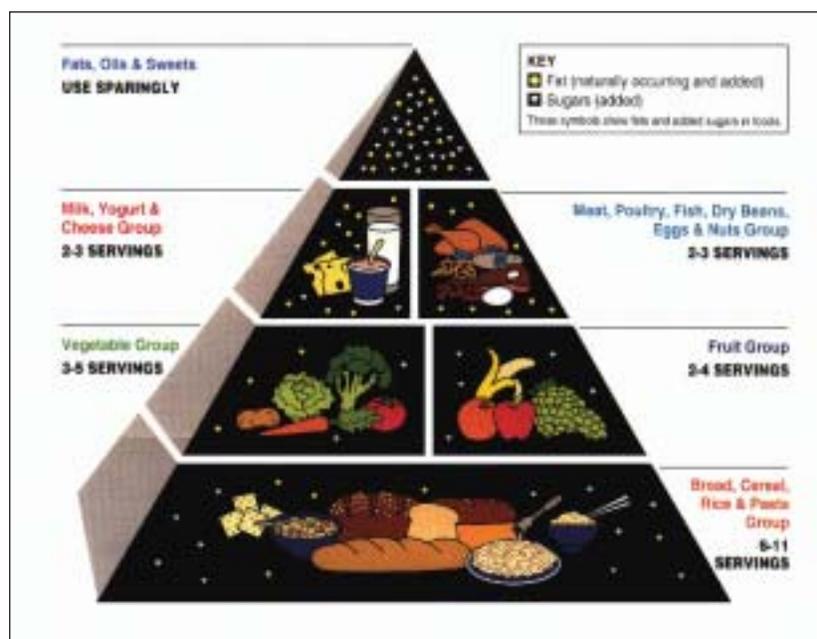
- Carotenoids from red and yellow/orange fruits and vegetables (such as tomatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots)
- Lycopene in tomato-based foods (such as tomato sauce, tomato paste)
- Lutein and Zeaxanthin in leafy greens (such as spinach, Romaine lettuce)
- Flavonoids in brightly colored fruits and vegetables (such as blueberries, cherries, strawberries)

The 5 A Day For Better Health Program recommends eating 5 to 9 servings of colorful fruits and vegetables every day.

The recommendation to eat 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day dates back to 1991 when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) first published the Food Guide Pyramid. The pyramid recommends eating 2 to 4 servings of fruits and 3 to 5 servings of vegetables every day for a total of 5 to 9 daily servings.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, released jointly by USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2000, recommend that:

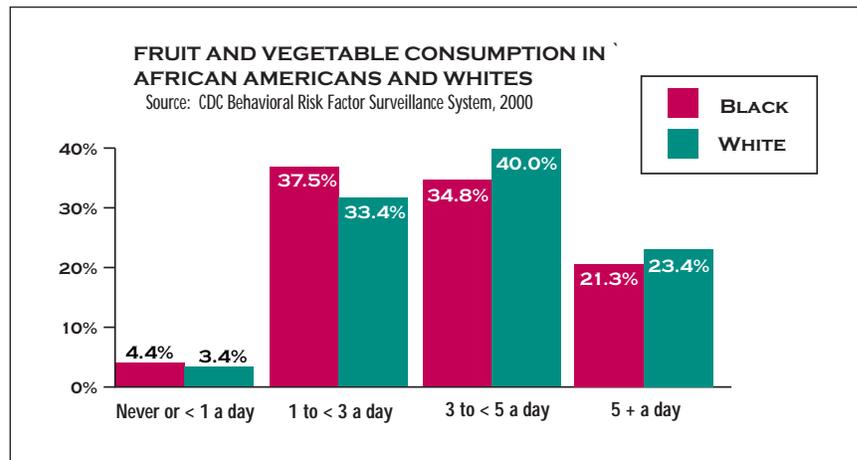
- Children over age 6, teenage girls, and active women eat 7 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Teenage boys and active men eat 9 servings a day, based on calorie needs.



## What is a serving?

What counts toward 5 to 9 A Day? All varieties of fruits and vegetables — fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100-percent juice. A serving size is smaller than many people think. The National Cancer Institute defines a serving as:

- One medium-sized fruit (apple, orange, banana, pear)
- 1/2 cup of raw, cooked, canned, or frozen fruits or vegetables
- 3/4 cup (6 oz.) of 100-percent fruit or vegetable juice
- 1/2 cup cut-up fruit
- 1/2 cup cooked or canned legumes (beans and peas)
- 1 cup of raw, leafy vegetables (lettuce, spinach)
- 1/4 cup dried fruit (raisins, apricots, mango)



## CONCLUSION

According to the latest estimates, African-American men's consumption of fruits and vegetables is declining. African-American men ate 3.9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day on average in 1991, compared to about 3.5 servings in 1997—approximately one-third of the amount recommended for good health by national health authorities. To address this, the National Cancer Institute has embarked on a comprehensive communications campaign to reach African-American men aged 35 to 50 years with the 9 A Day message.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is committed to reducing health disparities in America. Encouraging African-American men to eat 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day is a critical piece of that mission. In focus groups with African-American men, researchers found that clear messages about the specific benefits of eating more fruits and vegetables would resonate well with African-American audiences. NCI's 5 A Day For Better Health Program is committed to delivering those messages.

For more information on the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables, state-specific program information, recipes, and more, visit [www.9aday.cancer.gov](http://www.9aday.cancer.gov).

