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# TOP 10 KILLERS

*The Top 10 Health Conditions*  
DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTING  
**BLACK AMERICA**



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While there's enough evidence to show that African Americans have a higher life expectancy than in previous years, that doesn't mean that there aren't improvements that still need to be made. Black people are still at a higher risk for certain diseases than other ethnicities. As you might expect, the factors that influence these increased risks can be complicated. In many cases, these diseases can be caused by genetic differences, socioeconomic conditions, as well as how African Americans are considered when accessing healthcare. However, if you know what to look out for, you'll be able to take control of your health and possibly lower your risk.

## 10 SICKLE CELL DISEASE

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### WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION

Sickle cell disease gets its name from the abnormal shape that red blood cells get in those who have this condition. Their shape makes it more likely for them to stick together and block blood vessels. Additionally, sickle-shaped cells degenerate faster than regular blood cells, which leads to a continuous shortage within the body resulting in anemia. Persons with sickle cell disease may experience jaundice, fever, joint pain, and inflammation in the joints, as well as chronic fatigue.

If you have sickle cell disease, you should be on the lookout for other complications such as delayed growth, vision problems, kidney problems, coronary heart disease, and gall stones. Of course, all of the symptoms can be managed with medication and the right procedures, so an early diagnosis is best. Many states test newborns for the disease, but if this was not the case for you, it's a good idea to visit your doctor so you can be sure.

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# WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

According to recent data, only 100,000 Americans are living with sickle cell disease. However, of this number about 1 in 365 of these people are African Americans. For some reason, the disease is almost unheard of in white Americans. Additionally, another 1 in 13 Black American babies will be born with the sickle cell trait, which puts their future children at risk of developing the disease.

Mortality rates also vary as persons get older. For example, up to 68% of children under the age of 3 who have the condition are likely to die. This number drops to 39% up to the age of 9 then 24% for children who are between 10 and 14 years of age.

The numbers may seem dire, but the key to living well with sickle cell disease is getting diagnosed and treated at an early age. In fact, celebrities like Larenz Tate and Tionne 'T-Boz' Watkins are proof that persons can live healthily with sickle cell anemia.

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

The symptoms of sickle cell disease can be fairly distinctive while the trait may not be. If you're concerned about passing on the illness, the important thing is knowing for sure if you've been affected. Once you have that information, you'll know how to manage your health and that of your children. While there is nothing you can do about a genetic predisposition for sickle cell disease, you can tackle some others.

That includes sticking to the treatment program that your doctor recommends. When it comes to sickle cell disease, treatments can include medications that are meant to stop red blood cells from becoming ill-shaped and sticking together, antibiotics to fight potential infections, hydroxyurea to reduce pain and complications, as well as blood transfusions to increase your level of healthy red blood cells. While these options are generally effective, there are not without side effects.

The great news is that researchers are working on personalized treatments based on your genetics. Researchers are currently exploring gene therapies that can restore the affected genes that cause sickle cell disease or at least, introduce new genes that can improve function on a cellular level.

## 9 RENAL OR KIDNEY DISEASE

### WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION

As the name suggests, kidney disease affects the effective function of your renal system. Kidney disease has four different stages based on how well the organ is performing its duties of filtering the blood. In the earliest stages, you may not have any distinctive symptoms that can be brought to a doctor's attention. However, as the disease progresses, you'll become more aware of changes in your body.

Some of the symptoms you can experience include chronic fatigue, trouble sleeping, swollen feet, unexplained muscle cramps, and foamy urine. Even without these symptoms, it's recommended that African Americans have regular check-ups to ensure that their kidneys remain healthy. It only takes a simple blood test to determine if something is wrong. Diagnosing the disease and determining what might have caused its development will likely require more in-depth tests such as scans and biopsies.

## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

The numbers for African Americans and kidney disease can get complicated. This is because kidney disease can be caused by different factors. For example, high blood pressure can cause the condition and studies show that Black people are 60% more likely to be dealing with high blood pressure than other ethnicities. Additionally, the leading risk factor for kidney disease is diabetes, which affects African Americans twice as often as other ethnicities.

When it comes to kidney disease, research shows that Black people are more likely to be diagnosed with kidney disease in the later stages. A late diagnosis makes it more difficult to implement an effective treatment program, which explains why up to 35% of the persons undergoing dialysis for late-stage kidney disease are African Americans.

There are other factors that can influence developing kidney disease including genetic conditions. Whatever may cause the condition, African Americans are at triple the risk of renal failure than other ethnicities. As with most diseases, early detection is key but that doesn't mean that all hope is lost if you get to the late stages. In fact, many persons go on to live healthy lives with kidney disease - especially if they receive a kidney transplant as celebrities like Tina Turner and Stevie Wonder have.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Living well with kidney disease starts with sticking to your medical regimen. After being diagnosed and staged, your doctor will determine which route of treatment will be effective. If the condition was caused by another disease, your doctor's focus will be on treating it. Depending on the stage of kidney disease, you may need to undergo dialysis to help with filtering waste from the blood.

The good news is that while it's not yet possible to undo kidney damage, treating the underlying cause can prevent the disease's progression. If necessary, your doctor may recommend a kidney transplant. However, getting a new kidney doesn't mean that you don't have to think about staying healthy. Doctors recommend eating well, exercising regularly, and taking any medication that's been prescribed for your chronic conditions.



# 8 ASTHMA

## WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION

Asthma is characterized by wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. Depending on the type of asthma that you're diagnosed with, the symptoms can range from being mild to severe. This of course will influence the medications you'll need to use as well as how the daily routine can change. In mild cases, persons may only need medication in emergency situations while avoiding triggers. For severe cases, though, the medical regimen is more intensive and persons may need to visit the hospital more often. Asthma can also be divided into what causes an attack. One possibility is strenuous exercise.

The condition can be diagnosed at any point in your life. While it's common for asthma to be identified in children, persons are being diagnosed in adulthood as well. In many cases, persons develop asthma because of triggers in their environment. For example, if you're working with certain chemicals, it's possible that they can irritate your respiratory system. Other possible triggers include smoke, pollen, air pollution, specific fragrances, or physical exercise.



## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

It's still not completely clear why African Americans have a higher risk of developing asthma, though some studies suggest it's based on genetics. Whatever the cause may be, statistics show that Black people are 40% more likely to develop asthma while Black children are five times more at risk for being admitted to the hospital for asthma-related complications. Additionally, the risk of dying from asthma-related issues is eight times higher for African American children.

When it comes to older Black people, the chances of admission are four times higher than other ethnicities while the mortality rate almost triples. Despite the high numbers, health experts recommend an early diagnosis as well as sticking to a prescribed regimen to remain healthy. With the right protocol in place, you can live a long life with asthma regardless of its severity. If you have your doubts, consider that professional athletes like Jackie Joyner-Kersey and Jerome Bettis accomplished quite a bit while dealing with asthma.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Once you're diagnosed with asthma, your doctor will determine the way forward where medications or other treatments are concerned. For the most part, this will include using bronchodilators and steroids that make it much easier to breathe. Depending on the severity of your asthma, you might need to use a daily maintenance inhaler as well as an emergency inhaler to be used during an attack.



It's also important to note all your triggers. Just because something didn't make you sick yesterday, doesn't mean that it can't happen today. Interestingly, remaining physically active is another doctor-approved recommendation. When done right, you can remain healthy without triggering your condition.

While the treatment protocols for asthma are tested and tried, researchers are still looking for more effective options. The research entails finding longer-lasting and faster-acting inhalers for persons who are dealing with a severe form of the disease. If you'd be interested in that then finding a clinical trial is a great idea.

## **7 CHRONIC LIVER DISEASE**

### **WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION**

Chronic liver disease is a term used to describe a group of conditions that affect the liver. These diseases can include cirrhosis, autoimmune conditions, hepatitis, bile duct obstructions, congenital abnormalities, genetic disorders, and liver failure. It's important to note that the early signs of chronic liver disease may not be as noticeable. The most noteworthy one is feeling more tired than you usually would. Since this can be a symptom of different illnesses, it's worth having it checked out, even if you don't have liver disease.

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Once the disease progresses, symptoms typically become more apparent. Depending on the disease you're diagnosed with and the stage of liver disease, your symptoms are likely to differ however, these can include chronic fatigue, jaundice, abdominal pain, nausea, poor appetite, headaches, and weight loss. In more advanced stages of liver failure, you could experience muscle tremors, shortness of breath, swelling in the abdomen, and significant lethargy.

## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

According to health statistics, chronic liver disease is a leading cause of death in African Americans. Up to 2019, it was rated as the eighth of the top 10 illnesses of concern. The disease also affects Black men over twice as much as Black women. When it comes to liver cancer, in particular, Black men are 60% more likely to have the disease than other ethnicities. Black women are also 30% more likely to die.

These numbers are heavily influenced by the underlying causes of chronic liver disease. Some of these causes include diabetes, obesity, and hepatitis infections, which studies show are highly prevalent in the African American community. While the numbers may not seem to be in your favor, your odds are good with early diagnosis and treatment.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you've been diagnosed with any form of chronic liver disease, your best bet is to adhere to your recommended treatment. The treatment will target your specific condition and will be aimed at reducing the likelihood of continued liver damage. To ensure that the medication is working, your doctor is likely to conduct regular tests to check on your liver function. That's because liver function tests are the best way to check if the organ is filtering toxins as it should.

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In some cases, the liver damage is too advanced for anything to be done, and as such your doctor may recommend a liver transplant. However, the transplant doesn't mean you won't have to worry about liver disease anymore. Depending on the disease, you may still need to take certain medications. For example, a liver transplant is usually the last resort for persons who have Hepatitis C and have not been responding to treatment. Since the virus will still be in your system, you'll have to keep taking your medication to maintain the new liver's health.

The good news is that chronic liver disease can be prevented. Studies show that if you eat well, cut down on alcohol consumption, and keep on top of any other chronic illnesses, you should be able to prevent the disease. In the event that you already have chronic liver disease, it's a great idea to consider what clinical trials have to offer. While liver damage is not typically reversible, researchers are working on a form of cell therapy that may be able to do exactly that.

## 6 PERIPHERAL ARTERY DISEASE

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### WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION

As you might expect, this disease directly affects the arteries. Peripheral artery disease is characterized by narrowed arteries that significantly reduce blood flow to your extremities. You may notice the effects on your arms but they're more noticeable in the legs. In most cases, pain is the most common symptom and the level can range from being mild to severe. The location may also change depending on which arteries are being constricted.

Persons who are dealing with peripheral artery disease may experience symptoms such as painful cramping in their thighs, hips, or calves, numbness in the legs, shiny skin on your legs, a weak pulse in your legs, and pain in your arms. In severe cases, the pain may be bad enough to prevent you from sleeping or walking for even short periods.



## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

Where peripheral artery disease is concerned, studies show that African Americans are more likely to develop the condition over time than other ethnicities. Black men, in particular, have a 30% higher risk while Black women have a 28% higher risk. As with other diseases on this list, the higher risk of illness is linked to other underlying conditions. These conditions include diabetes and high blood pressure, which are two illnesses that Black people are more likely to develop.

Though the numbers seem dire, it's important to note that peripheral artery disease is preventable and manageable. If you have underlying conditions, make sure that you're following the prescribed medical regimen as well as any recommended lifestyle changes. Paying attention to your body can also help to identify early symptoms so you can know what to tell your doctor.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

For the most part, preventing peripheral artery disease is linked to having healthy eating habits, quitting smoking, and exercising regularly. Additionally, other chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes can be contributing factors. If you have been diagnosed or suspect that you have these conditions, it's important to get them under control quickly.

Persons who have already been diagnosed with peripheral artery disease are typically given medications to address the underlying issues that contributed to the development of the illness as well as the symptoms.

For example, certain drugs will improve blood flow to the leg and reduce your leg pain. In some cases, persons need to undergo surgical procedures that may inflate the affected arteries or create new pathways that will help to increase their blood flow.

The treatment options for peripheral artery disease are effective and well-documented but that doesn't mean advances aren't being made all the time. For example, researchers are designing treatment plans that include anti-coagulants which can help to open up constricted arteries. As the effects of these drugs are being documented, it's a good idea to ask your doctor about your options.

# 5 DIABETES

## WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION

With diabetes, the body has trouble converting the sugar you eat into energy. This either happens because you're not producing enough insulin to do this work or your body just isn't using the insulin it produces well. There are two types of diabetes. In Type 1 diabetes, insulin production is reduced or stopped entirely and the symptoms develop quickly. Type 2 diabetes, on the other hand, means that your body isn't using insulin effectively. The second type typically develops over time and so it can be easy to miss the early symptoms.

It's also possible to develop a form of the disease during pregnancy known as gestational diabetes. While that needs to be properly managed while you're pregnant, it usually passes after childbirth. Some of the symptoms you can expect with diabetes include weight loss, increased thirst, chronic fatigue, and sores that won't heal. Men, in particular, may also have erectile dysfunction and poor muscle strength. Women may notice more urinary tract and yeast infections.



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## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

The numbers for diabetes in African Americans are pretty staggering. Black people are 60% more likely to be diagnosed with the disease than other ethnicities and are doubly at risk of death. To make things worse, being diabetic give African Americans higher odds of complications and other chronic illnesses. For example, Black people with diabetes are twice as likely to be hospitalized for a limb amputation as well as three times as likely to be further diagnosed with late-stage kidney disease.

Being diagnosed with diabetes also increases your odds of heart issues. It's not all bad news, though. The condition can be easily managed if you make changes to your lifestyle and take the medication that your doctor prescribes. Some people you may know that have their diabetes under control are Halle Berry and Anthony Anderson.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Persons who've been diagnosed with diabetes typically have a bit of a learning curve to manage their diabetes. Living well with the condition typically entails not only taking the necessary medication but also learning to identify a diabetic crisis. A crisis happens when your sugar levels are dangerously low and you run the risk of needing emergency care. If there are underlying issues that caused you to develop Type 2 diabetes, these will need to be addressed as well.

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While Type 1 diabetes can't be reversed, there is some hope with Type 2. Persons who have developed that form of the condition because of poor eating habits or unhealthy weight have had some success with leaving diabetes behind if they eat well and exercise regularly. The same is true if you'd like to avoid developing Type 2 diabetes altogether. It's best to remove unhealthy fats, processed foods, and refined carbohydrates from your diet. At least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise per day will also help.

Though the current treatment options are effective, that doesn't mean researchers aren't searching for improvements. These advances include finding ways to introduce an artificial pancreatic system to improve insulin production as well as more efficient ways of handling blood sugar fluctuations in Type 1 diabetes.

## 4. HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

### WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION

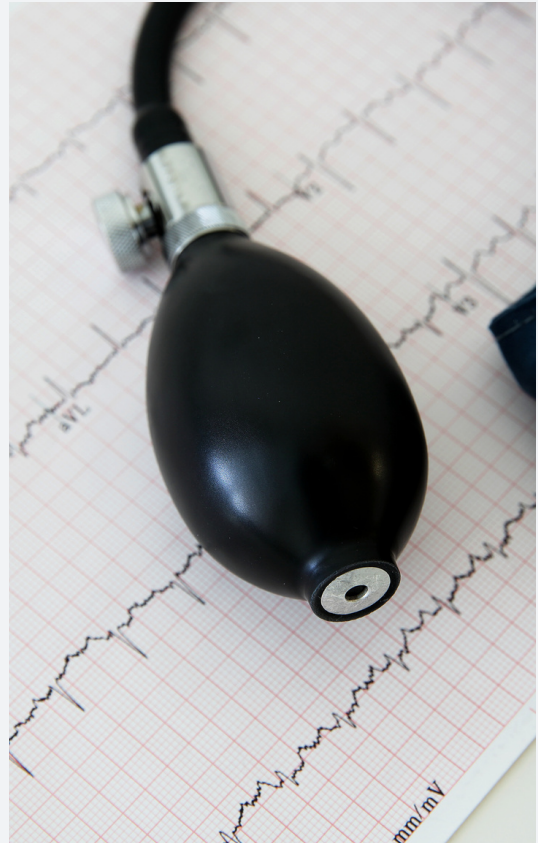
Your blood pressure is determined by how much blood your heart pumps as well as the resistance your arteries put up to this blood flow. When the blood pressure is high, it suggests that there is a lot of resistance to the blood pumping through your body. This typically happens because the arteries are narrower than they should be. If high blood pressure isn't addressed, you can suffer from a heart attack or stroke. Over time, persistently high blood pressure can lead to chronic kidney disease.

It doesn't have to go that far, however, because it's fairly easy to tell if you have high blood pressure if you have regular doctor visits. Typically, there might not be any symptoms until your blood pressure is significantly higher than usual. Some of the symptoms you might experience include a severe headache, fatigue, a nosebleed, confusion, chest pain, and an irregular heartbeat.



## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

When it comes to high blood pressure, the numbers are definitely stacked against African Americans. While 1 in 2 Americans will deal with the condition, over 50% of that number will be black. Furthermore, when persons were studied, it was found that approximately 75% of African American men and women developed high blood pressure before the age of 55. This number is significant because Black people are more likely to have the condition at a younger age than other ethnicities.



In addition to those numbers, you have to consider that conditions such as diabetes increase your risk of high blood pressure. As discussed earlier, African Americans are more prone to this chronic illness as well. Despite the grim outlook though, persons can live healthy lives with a diagnosis of high blood pressure. Two of the names you might recognize include Toni Braxton and Oprah Winfrey.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Living with high blood pressure generally means taking your medication and sticking to a healthy lifestyle. The medications are designed to alleviate the narrowing in your arteries as well as facilitate proper blood flow. If the high blood pressure is being caused by other conditions, there will likely be medications for that too.

To ensure that you're healthy, your doctor will carry out regular checks on your heart and kidneys to make sure the elevated blood pressure hasn't had a negative effect on other organs. One of the issues that persons often complain about is the side effects of the high blood pressure medication. Fortunately, researchers are constantly working on new drugs that are more effective with fewer side effects. Persons who have not yet been diagnosed with high blood pressure have a lot of options for staying on top of their health. If you have other chronic conditions, make sure that you're taking the medications as directed. Additionally, doctors recommend eating well, maintaining a healthy weight, quitting smoking, exercising regularly, and drinking less alcohol.

## 3 STROKE

### WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THIS CONDITION

A stroke happens when blood flow to the brain is obstructed in some way or a blood vessel ruptures. Typically strokes are caused by three factors and can be categorized as such. A transient ischemic attack (TIA) is caused by a temporary blockage such as a blood clot. Over a period, this blockage can be resolved. An ischemic stroke is also caused by a blockage but it can be a clot or a build-up of fatty deposits in your arteries. Finally, a hemorrhagic stroke happens when a blood vessel bursts or starts to leak.

Regardless of the cause of the stroke, persons who are experiencing one must receive immediate care. During a stroke, the brain is deprived of well-needed oxygen and there can be permanent damage to the body's systems. Some of the noteworthy symptoms of a stroke include numbness in the arm or face, paralysis, slurred speech, trouble walking, dizziness, a sudden headache, and trouble maintaining balance.

## HAT THE NUMBERS SAY

Almost 800,000 Americans have a stroke each year and the numbers indicate that Black people are twice as likely to be in this number than any other ethnicity. Worse yet, African Americans typically have strokes at younger ages and longer recovery times than others. While there have been advancements in treating strokes quickly, African Americans have only seen a 20% reduction in death rates from the condition.

As with other diseases on this list, Black people have a combined increased risk because disorders such as sickle cell disease typically influence your likelihood of having a stroke. Despite what the numbers say, though, there is some good news. Almost 40% of those who have strokes recovery fairly quickly and without long-lasting effects. For those who have effects, there are numerous resources to help with living well.



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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Persons who are having a stroke need immediate attention. Doctors will focus on reversing the cause of the stroke before doing anything else. For example, anticoagulants may be used to break up blood clots that are cutting off blood flow to the brain. If there is a bleed, this will need to be repaired through surgery. Blood and imaging tests may also be used to confirm that a stroke has occurred as well as the cause of the condition.

Recovering from a stroke is another matter. This usually includes rehabilitation and continued work with specialists to ensure that you can live well after a stroke and don't have another one. The type and frequency of rehabilitation you'll need will depend on the severity of your stroke. Fortunately, researchers are constantly working on improving the efficiency of rehabilitation. One procedure uses repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation to speed up your recovery.

Of course, the best thing is to prevent having a stroke in the first place. A few of the risk factors that can cause a stroke are poor eating habits, a lack of exercise, drinking too much alcohol, smoking, and chronic illnesses that affect the heart. A family history of strokes also plays a role in your risk. Since there is little that can be done about that, regular doctor visits are recommended to determine the state of your health.

## 2. CANCER

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### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS CONDITION

Typically, the term 'cancer' is used to describe a disorder in which the body's cells multiply uncontrollably. These growths are called tumors and the location of these tumors is used to determine the type of cancer you have. Furthermore, doctors stage cancers based on the size of the tumors and if they have started to spread. In some cases, you can have cancer without experiencing symptoms in the early stages.

However, a few of the general symptoms you can expect include chronic fatigue, unexplained weight loss, unexplained bleeding, chronic pain, and changes in your appetite. While these can be caused by other diseases, it's best to visit the doctor if there are any concerns. Regardless of the type of cancer, it's likely to respond to treatment more quickly when diagnosed early.

## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

Recent statistics show that cancer is the second leading illness-related cause of death in the African American community. Generally, Black people are four times more likely to be diagnosed with cancer than other ethnicities. While the mortality rates have fallen by 25% over the years, African Americans are still more likely to pass away from cancer. The type of cancer you should be concerned about also varies according to gender. The top 5 forms of cancer for women are breast, lung, colon, uterus, and pancreas. For men, the top 5 are prostate, lung, colon, kidneys, and liver. Black women are also at a higher risk for triple-negative breast cancer, which is an aggressive form of the disease.

Depending on the type of cancer, it's not always easy to pinpoint the symptoms in the early stages. However, studies show that your chances of surviving the disease greatly improve when it's detected as early as possible. In even better news, there's a lot to look forward to where the advances in treatment are concerned. Researchers are especially focused on treating the types of cancer that are usually aggressive and difficult to treat.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Though there are different types of cancer, the treatment options are fairly similar. If you've been diagnosed with cancer, your doctor is likely to discuss chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted drug therapy, and hormone therapy with you. In some cases, you may need surgery as well. While undergoing treatment, you'll need to take care of your body so it can fight cancer appropriately. That usually means eating well, exercising, and getting enough rest.

When it comes to preventing cancer, there are a few things to bear in mind. Some cancers such as lung cancer can be influenced by lifestyle behaviors like smoking. Other cancers may be caused by drinking too much alcohol or eating unhealthy foods. The first step in maintaining our health will be practicing a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, some risks are genetic so sticking to a regular doctor visit schedule is your best bet.



# 1. HEART DISEASE

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS CONDITION

Heart disease refers to different illnesses that affect how well the heart functions. That includes coronary artery disease, congenital heart defects such as atypical heart valves, arrhythmia, heart failure, and heart attacks among others. Depending on the condition that's affecting you, the symptoms may be sudden or develop over time. For example, a heart attack comes with breathlessness, chest pain, stomach pain, nausea, and an irregular heartbeat.

On the other hand, conditions like heart failure can come with chronic fatigue, lightheadedness, and swelling in the feet. Even without notable symptoms, it's recommended that you have regular doctor visits that include checking your heart. It's easier to pick up on damage to your heart as well as defects that can cause a problem.

## WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

Generally, heart disease is the leading killer of Americans every year. However, African Americans are 30% more likely to be a part of those affected than other ethnicities. The numbers show that 48% of African American women and 44% of men will be diagnosed with heart disease annually. These higher numbers are directly related to how prone Black people are to the other conditions that contribute to heart disease. For example, Black people are 40% more likely to have high blood pressure, with women specifically going as high as 60%.

Additionally, African Americans are twice as likely to die from heart disease from age 16-49 and comprise 25% of older Americans who die at 65 or younger. It's good news then that there are a few people you might know who have been living healthy lives with heart disease. 16-year-old Lyric Ross is one of those as well as Robin Givens and Darlene Love.



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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

The treatment for heart disease will depend on the condition that you're dealing with. Some persons will need blood thinners, beta-blockers, diuretics, drugs that lower cholesterol, drugs that lower high blood pressure, and platelet therapy. To live well with heart disease, you need to follow your regimen. It will also be important to exercise regularly, eat properly, stop smoking, cut down on alcohol, and manage other chronic illnesses.

There's a lot of good news when it comes to advances in treating heart disease, though. With all the variations in what can cause the condition and how persons react to medications, there is still a lot of room for improvement in treatment options. Fortunately, researchers are constantly working on new drugs and devices that can help persons to manage and treat heart disease.

If you haven't been diagnosed with heart disease, make sure to keep on top of your doctor visits. While you can't negate a family history of heart disease, you stand a great chance of avoiding the condition if you make changes to your lifestyle. These changes include adopting a heart-healthy diet and exercising



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