



Does Being a Person of Color Increase Your Health Risks?

Thursday, January 28, 2021



The US has become more ethnically diverse in the last century, and in general our health and the quality of care we receive has improved. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case for some people of color. In fact, certain medical conditions and health behaviors—and the factors that can lead to them—are more common or severe among some people of color. Below are facts about 5 such conditions and behaviors, followed by steps you can take to help prevent them.

Diabetes. Among adults in the US, diabetes is the main cause of kidney failure, certain kinds of lower limb amputation, and new cases of blindness. It is also a major cause of

heart disease.

Compared with whites, the rate of diagnosed diabetes is 77% higher among blacks, 66% higher among Hispanics, and 18% higher among Asians. Hispanics are about 50% more likely to die from diabetes than whites.

Heart health. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the US.

Compared to whites, blacks are 40% more likely to have high blood pressure and are at least 50% more likely to die earlier from heart disease or stroke than whites. Hispanics have 24% more poorly controlled high blood pressure compared with whites.

Obesity. Obesity is a risk factor for a number of serious disease and health conditions including heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer. While the rate of obesity is high among all population groups in the US, there are differences among people of color.

Blacks have the highest rates of obesity (48.1%), followed by Hispanics (42.5%), whites (34.5%), and Asians (11.7%). These percentages include people with a range of different ages.

Cancer. Cancer is the second most common cause of death in the US. Only heart disease kills more people.

The death rate for all cancers in the US is 25% higher for African Americans than for whites. In the US, white women have the highest incidence rate for breast cancer, but African-American women are more likely to die from the disease. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have the highest incidence rates for both liver and stomach cancer. In addition, people from these groups are twice as likely to die from these cancers compared with whites. African-American men have the highest incidence rate for prostate cancer and are more than twice as likely as white men to die of the disease in the US.

Smoking. Tobacco use is the single largest preventable cause of death and disease in the US.

Compared with most other racial/ethnic groups in the US, American Indians/Alaska Natives have a higher prevalence of smoking. In 2015, about 22% of US adult American Indians/Alaska Natives smoked cigarettes, compared with about 15% of US adults overall. Overall, 14% of Hispanic adults smoke. However, 26% of Puerto Rican males and 22% of Cuban males smoke. African Americans typically smoke fewer cigarettes than whites but are more likely to die from smoking-related diseases.

Steps to take to improve your health

There are things you can do to protect or improve your health. For example, you can:

Talk with your healthcare provider about any health issues you may have, your risks for

developing a condition in the future, and steps you can take to prevent a condition from developing. Talk with your family members to learn more about your family health history and genetic risk factors you may have. Then talk with your healthcare provider about what you found out. Work with your healthcare provider to: Quit smoking. Become more physically active. Make healthy food choices.

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Originally published, Thursday, January 28, 2021