The African American Man’s Playbook on Cardiovascular Disease
The cardiovascular disease (CVD) outreach “Playbook” is designed to heighten awareness and stimulate a proactive approach to reducing the burden of CVD among African American men in metro Denver. The Center for African American Health and the Denver Bronco Alumni Association wants you to be aware of the silent nature of CVD and its warning signs. Remember, the life you save may be your own.

Mission Statement
The Center for African American Health is committed to improving the health and well being of the African-American community.
Training Camp

It’s the first day of training camp and you are going to learn about how we play offense against Cardiovascular Disease (CVD). High blood pressure is like being tackled from the blind side. You must check your blood pressure on a regular basis. A heart attack is like being sacked, so it is important that you recognize the warning signs. And, like a fumble on 3rd down, strokes do not give you the opportunity to try again. Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability.

Despite advances in the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular disease, chronic illness and death from CVD is higher among Black Americans than among White, Hispanic and Asian Americans. African Americans have the greatest chance of having cardiovascular disease. Some of the common risk factors are hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and smoking. This risk is excessive given the smaller number of Blacks in Colorado.
Do not be “sidelined” by the health issues associated with CVD:

- **Atherosclerosis** is the build-up of plaque/cholesterol on the artery walls. This is also known as hardening of the arteries.

- **Heart Attack** occurs when an area of unstable plaque eventually bursts, tears or ruptures, creating a “snag” where a blood clot forms and blocks the artery. This leads to a heart attack.

- **Heart Disease** is caused when the heart grows larger than normal and destroys arteries by making them flabby causing scaring and narrowing.

- **Congestive Heart Failure** happens when the heart is unable to empty its chambers. Blood builds up on the left side causing fluid to back up into the lungs.

- **Stroke** is caused by either a hemorrhage or clot in the brain usually associated with long-term unmanaged high blood pressure.

- **Kidney disease** is the thickening or narrowing of the arteries in the kidneys and is responsible for at least 26% of kidney disease in the U.S.
Do not be “clipped” by the risk factors associated with CVD:

- **Lack of physical activity:** physical activity helps maintain normal blood pressure, but few people get the amount of exercise they should to stay healthy.

- **Weight gain:** as your body weight increases, your blood pressure can rise. In fact, being overweight can make you two to six times more likely to develop high blood pressure than if you are at your desirable weight.

- **Smoking:** raises the blood pressure, making the heart work harder to maintain blood flow.

- **Nutrition/diet:** fats, cholesterol-rich foods and salt can raise blood pressure.

- **Alcohol:** alcohol use has been linked to high blood pressure.

- **Stress:** has been linked to elevated blood pressure.

Some risk factors for CVD are out of your control:

**Genetics, race, age** and **gender** may also play a role and make matters more complicated. Did dad have high blood pressure because of genetics, or because he had high stress, ate fatty foods or smoked? Risk factors can vary from person to person.
It’s Game Day! Game One

You vs. High Blood Pressure

Often known as the “silent killer,” hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, affects one out of every three African Americans. If you are over the age of 65, it is two out of every three.

The reason for the high incidence of high blood pressure in African Americans in the U.S. is not fully known. It is believed that high blood pressure among African Americans is the highest in the world.

African Americans tend to develop high blood pressure earlier in life than others and it is usually more severe. Untreated high blood pressure is like the final seconds ticking off the game clock – if left alone or poorly managed the complications can be fatal.
What is blood pressure?

The top number (systolic) is the greatest pressure in the arteries when the heart beats. The bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure in the arteries while the heart is resting between beats.

Optimal blood pressure - 120/80
Normal blood pressure - 130/85
High blood pressure - 140/90 or above

What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

In most cases there are no symptoms; which is why this chronic illness is known as “the silent killer.” It destroys vital organs without you knowing about it. In some cases of uncontrolled high blood pressure, the symptoms may include:

- Vision problems;
- Headaches;
- Chest pain;
- Breathing problems.

Complications of high blood pressure:

Compared with Whites:
- African Americans have a 1.3 times greater chance of having a stroke;
- African Americans have a 1.8 times greater chance of having a fatal stroke;
- African Americans have a 1.5 times greater chance of having heart disease;
- African Americans have a 4.2 times greater chance of having kidney failure.

What should I do to control my high blood pressure?

- Take your medications as prescribed;
- Learn how to monitor your blood pressure;
- Monitor your blood pressure often;
- Keep a record of your blood pressure results;
- If blood pressure remains elevated call your doctor as you may need your medication changed.
It’s Game Day! Game Two
You vs. Heart Attack

How does high blood pressure affect the heart? The harder your heart muscle has to work, the thicker your heart muscle will become. This is called hypertrophy or hypertensive heart. This causes the heart to grow larger than normal by thickening the walls in the ventricles (a heart chamber which collects blood). While muscles growing larger is good for your biceps, it is not good for your heart.

Increasing systolic blood pressure (the top number) increases the risk for a heart attack. With uncontrolled high blood pressure the heart pumps harder and it becomes more difficult to push blood through smaller and often thicker blood vessels.
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| A heart attack occurs when an area of unstable plaque eventually bursts, tears or ruptures, creating a “snag” where a blood clot forms and blocks the artery. | Some heart attacks are sudden and intense. Most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected are not sure what is wrong and they wait too long before getting help. | - Chest discomfort – Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.  
- Discomfort in areas of the upper body – symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, and back. In some cases women can experience pain in the neck, jaw or stomach.  
Other signs – these may include:  
- Breaking out in a cold sweat;  
- Nausea;  
- Light headedness. | - Call 911!!!  
- Do not drive yourself to the hospital, have someone drive you! |
It’s Game Day! Game Three

You vs. Stroke

Strokes occur when an artery to the brain becomes clogged with fatty deposits. The clogged part of the brain begins to starve from lack of blood, oxygen and nutrients causing damage to brain tissue.
There are two types of stroke:
- An Ischemic stroke is caused by a blood clot in the blood vessel in the brain;
- A Hemorrhagic stroke is caused by rupture or break of a blood vessel in the brain.

What are the warning signs of a stroke?
- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body;
- Sudden confusion; trouble speaking or understanding;
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes;
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination;
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

What are some common complications of stroke?
Because a stroke can affect any part of the brain, complications may vary. The most common complications are:
- Edema (eh-DEmah) brain swelling;
- Seizures – abnormal electrical activity in the brain causing convulsions;
- Bedsores – pressure ulcers that result from decreased ability to move;
- Limb contractures – shortened muscles in an arm or leg from reduced range of motion or lack of exercise;
- Shoulder pain – lack of support or exercise of an arm;
- Blood vessel problems – blood clots form in veins;
- Urinary tract infection, bladder control urgency and incontinence;
- Risk of pneumonia.

What should I do if I think I’m having a stroke?
*Stroke is a medical emergency. Every second counts!*
- Call 911!!!
- Getting help in less than three hours will greatly improve your chances of recovery;
- Do not call your doctors office;
- Do not drive to the hospital;
- Keep a record of all medications.
Forty percent of Black men die prematurely from cardiovascular disease as compared to 21% of white men;
Black men live 7.1 years less than any other group in the U.S.;
Among men age 20 and older, the following have high blood pressure:
- 42.6% of Blacks;
- 32.5% of Whites;
- 28.7% of Mexican Americans.
Stroke is the 3rd leading cause of death in the U.S.;
Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability;
Among men age 20 and older, the following have had a stroke:
- 2.4% of white men;
- 4.1% of Black men;
- 3.1% of Mexican Americans.
It is estimated that there are 2.4 million male stroke survivors;
Forty-seven percent of men age 40 and over die within 5 years after a first stroke;
Heart attack is the single leading cause of death among American males - 51.6%;
Within five years of a recognized heart attack, 16% of men age 40-69 will have another heart attack;
Nearly 3% of Black males and 1.1% of White males will experience sudden cardiac death.

Now that you know what CVD is, its impact and what you should do to manage and prevent it, you are on your way to the Playoffs!
Road to the Super Bowl!
Here is what you need to know...

Prevent high blood pressure:
You can take steps to prevent high blood pressure by adopting a healthy lifestyle. Maintain a healthy weight; stay physically active; follow a healthy eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy foods; choosing and preparing foods with less sodium; and drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation. If you smoke – stop.

Consistent physical activity:
More than 50% of American adults do not get enough physical activity to provide health benefits. Physical activity promotes health, improves wellness, and reduces the risk of coronary heart disease. It also decreases the risk of stroke and high blood pressure. You can “sack” CVD by increasing your physical activity.

Ideas for physical activities:
- Walking
- Bicycling
- Weight Training
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Golfing
- Aerobics

Stress Management:
Stress can cause you to have sustained elevated blood pressure and over time may contribute to chronic high blood pressure that requires medical treatment. Stress management is essential (just like a good down field block on a kick-off) if you are going to “put the moves” on CVD.

Tips for managing stress:
- Be realistic don’t take on more than you can handle;
- Shed the “superman” urge. Ask for help when you need it;
- Share your feelings. Talk about your feelings and don’t try to cope alone.
Make wise food choices:

Eat less fat such as saturated fat, trans-fat and foods high in cholesterol. Remember, food does not have to be high in fat to taste good. Pick up the CVD “blitz” by avoiding:

- Fast foods;
- Store bought baked goods like cookies, cakes and chips;
- Processed foods like packaged meats and snacks;
- Margarine and shortening.

Choose the kinds of fat that can help lower your cholesterol:

- Use a low-fat or fat-free method when cooking;
- Cook with less salt;
- Choose low-fat dairy products.

Choose foods with less fat like:

- Avocado;
- Nuts, almond, cashew, peanuts;
- Salmon;
- Albacore tuna.

Choose lean cuts of:

- Beef;
- Pork;
- Skinless poultry;
- Fish.

Other tips:

- Read food nutrition labels carefully;
- Practice eating recommended serving size;
- Eat more foods that are high in fiber;
- Limit your alcohol consumption.

Do not smoke – if you smoke QUIT.

Smoking tobacco makes it difficult for the heart to maintain blood flow and it gives CVD a “leg up” when you are in the red zone.
Resources and References


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Empowering the Community to Live Well!

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