# Bring American Heart Month to Your African American Community: Join the #OurHearts Movement

February is American Heart Month! Did you know that people who have close relationships at home, work, or in their community tend to be healthier and live longer? One reason, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), is that we’re more successful at meeting our health goals when we work on them with others. NHLBI launched the #OurHearts movement to inspire us to protect and strengthen our hearts with the support of others.

Here are some facts, how-to tips, and resources to inspire you to join with others, even if you can’t be physically together, to improve your heart health.

[Heart disease](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/cad) is a leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Health problems that increase the risk of heart disease are common in African American communities, including being overweight and having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Having multiple risk factors increases your risk for heart disease. People with poor cardiovascular health are also at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

**Did you know?**

**African American women ages 20 and older:** 80% are overweight, 46% have high blood pressure, 33% have high cholesterol, and 13% have been diagnosed with diabetes.

**African American men ages 20 and older:** 70% are overweight, 44% have high blood pressure, 30% have high cholesterol, and 15% have been diagnosed with diabetes.

## Why Connecting is Good for Your Heart

Feeling connected with others and having positive, close relationships benefit our overall health, including our blood pressure and weight. Having people in our lives who motivate and care for us helps, as do feelings of closeness and companionship.

[Follow these lifestyle tips](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/heart-healthy-lifestyle-changes) to protect your heart. It will be easier and more successful if you work on them with others, including by texting or phone calls if needed:

* Be more physically active.
* Maintain a healthy weight.
* Eat a nutritious diet.
* Quit smoking.
* Reduce stress.
* Get 7-8 hours of quality sleep.
* Track your heart health stats.

You don’t have to make big changes all at once. Small steps will get you where you want to go. Here are some tips to get you started.

**Move more**

Invite family, friends, colleagues, or members of your community to join you in your efforts to be more [physically active](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/physical-activity-and-your-heart):

* Ask a colleague to walk “with you” on a regular basis, put the date on both your calendars, and text or call to make sure you both get out for the walk.
* Get a friend or family member to sign up for the same online exercise class, such as a dance class. Make it a regular date.
* Grab your kids, put on music, and do jumping jacks, skip rope, or dance in your living room or yard.

**How much is enough?** Aim for at least 2½ hours of physical activity eachweek—that’s just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. In addition, do muscle strengthening exercises 2 days a week. Can’t carve out a lot of time in your day? Don’t chuck your goal, chunk it! Try 10 or 15 minutes a few times a day. NHLBI’s [Move More fact sheet](https://secure-web.cisco.com/1bGsWEbRBAdjxEyfXbCSolhiNjtxgXMcpLaOWhtBOflIJIn10baVFNcEcUY3WYfM3AhhR8G91tZvlc5BDds__JQ80vosWa9GuOTKDouq2-6Urap0ZHLyzIiwKZ1gZvZrHZ2fkW7vbKoBIE0D2633ImCyForko7DpDik7jih5gywqIbHekgzxaOQDQD7Gi9yXi15ewP11mOBi0c-BxXT_stKvpepK979ljIXZHtUIzT0runrDtad-2TaPNMxc9T66K/https%3A//www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/all-publications-and-resources/move-more-making-physical-activity-routine) has ideas to get and keep you moving.

**Aim for a healthy weight**

Find someone in your friend group, at work, or in your family who also wants to reach or maintain a healthy weight. (If you’re overweight, even a small weight loss of 5–10 percent helps your health.) Check in with them regularly to stay motivated. Agree to do healthy activities, like walking or cooking a healthy meal, at the same time, even if you can’t be together. Share low-calorie, low-sodium recipes. Check out [NHLBI's Aim for a Healthy Weight](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/index.htm) web page.

**Eat heart healthy**

We tend to eat like our friends and family, so ask others close to you to join in your effort to eat healthier. Together, try NHLBI’s free [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan) eating plan. Research shows that, compared to a typical American diet, it lowers blood pressure and improves cholesterol levels. Find delicious recipes at [NHLBI’s Heart-Healthy Eating](https://healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov/) web page.

**Quit smoking**

To help you quit, ask others for support or join an online support group. Research shows that people are much more likely to quit if their spouse, friend, or sibling does. Social support online can help you quit. All states have quit lines with trained counselors—call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). You’ll find many free resources to help you quit, such as apps, a motivational text service, and a chat line at [BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov](https://betobaccofree.hhs.gov/) and [Smokefree.gov](https://smokefree.gov/).

If you need extra motivation to quit, consider those around you: breathing other people’s smoke, called secondhand smoke, is dangerous. Many adult *nonsmokers* die of stroke, heart disease, and lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke.

### Manage stress

Reducing stress helps your heart health. Set goals with a friend or family member to do a relaxing activity every day, like walking, yoga, or meditation, or participate in an online stress-management program together. Physical activity also helps reduce stress. Talk to a qualified mental health provider or someone else you trust.

### Improve sleep

Sleeping 7–8 hours a night helps to improve heart health. De-stressing will help you sleep, as does getting a 30-minute daily dose of sunlight. Take a walk instead of a late afternoon nap! Family members and friends: remind each other to turn off the screen and stick to a regular bedtime. Instead of looking at your phone or the TV before bed, relax by listening to music, reading, or taking a bath.

## Track your heart health stats, together

Keeping a log of your blood pressure, weight goals, physical activity, and if you have diabetes, your blood sugars, will help you stay on a heart-healthy track. Ask your friends or family to join you in the effort. Check out NHLBI’s [Healthy Blood Pressure for Healthy Hearts: Tracking Your Numbers worksheet](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/all-publications-and-resources/healthy-blood-pressure-healthy-hearts-tracking-your).

**Visit** [**#**OurHearts](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/ourhearts) for inspiration on what others around the country are doing together for their heart health. Then join the #OurHearts movement and let NHLBI know what you’re doing to have a healthy heart. Tag #OurHearts to share how you and your family and friends are being heart healthy.