

Black Women's Health Study



BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



HOWARD UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

July 2004 Newsletter



News from the Black Women's Health Study

**WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE
THE HEALTH OF BLACK WOMEN**

Please check to see if this label is correctly addressed.

If your last name or address has changed from that on the mailing label, please fill in the correct name and address and mail it to us on this prepaid postcard.

DO WE HAVE YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS?

From time to time we'd like to send you late breaking news. We can send e-mails at no cost. If you wish to be reached by e-mail in the future, please e-mail your address to bwhs@slone.bu.edu.

Has your name, address, telephone number, or e-mail changed?

If so, please make changes and mail this postcard.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone Number _____

E-mail Address _____

If there are no changes, please do not mail this back.

WHAT DO WOMEN IN THE BWHS DO FOR THEIR HEALTH?

On the 2001 health survey we asked you to list the 5 most important things that you do for your health. Here are the most frequently reported responses and the percentage of participants who reported them.

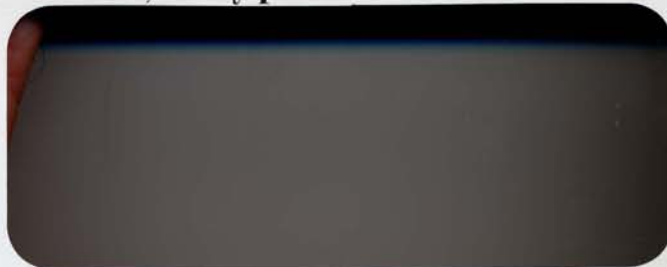


- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. A better diet (e.g., more fruits and veggies, less fat) | 70% |
| 2. Exercise (not including walking) | 25% |
| 3. Reduce stress(e.g., meditation, listen to music) | 25% |
| 4. Drink more water | 24% |
| 5. Walk | 20% |
| 6. Healthier habits and activities | 15% |
| 7. Take vitamins | 15% |
| 8. Spirituality | 13% |

The old saying is "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Happily, BWHS participants are taking this maxim very seriously.

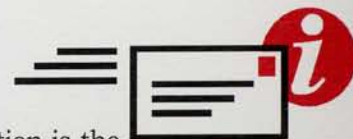
WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN A "PARTICIPANTS' ADVISORY GROUP" TO ADVISE BWHS INVESTIGATORS ABOUT FUTURE DIRECTIONS? IF YES, PLEASE LET US KNOW.

Please complete your 2003 Health survey if you haven't already done so. If you prefer, you can do it on line via our website, or by phone at 1-800-786-0814.



Please Tell Us

The 10th anniversary of the BWHS is fast approaching! The scientific community has judged the study to be a great success. Your participation is the reason for this, and continued success depends on your willingness to keep participating. We would love to hear about your experience as a BWHS participant. What motivated you to become involved? Have you benefited from participating in the BWHS? How? Do you have a special story that you could share with us? What could we do to increase the benefits to you (e.g., more health information)? What information could we add to the BWHS website? Please email us at bwhs@slone.bu.edu or call us at 1-800 786-0814.



ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BWHS

We thank all of you who have written comments and questions on their questionnaires or have sent letters, emailed, or telephoned us. Here are answers to questions that may be of interest to all BWHS participants.

Q. I'm healthy. Why do you need information from me?

- A. By comparing the characteristics of women who remain healthy with those of women who develop a particular illness, we can determine what might be causing or preventing the illness. For example, we may find that women who exercise a certain number of hours a week develop the illness less often, or that women who eat certain types of food develop it more often.

Q. I'm healthy. What will the BWHS do for me?

- A. The study will provide information on ways of living that will keep you healthy. For example, we are trying to learn how much exercise and what types will protect against diabetes. In addition to helping you, the BWHS provides important information that will be helpful to the millions of black women who are not in the study and to future generations of black girls and women.

Q. Why do you need information every 2 years?

- A. We need to find out if you have remained healthy or if you have been affected by an illness since the last health survey. We also need to find out about your exercise patterns, use of medications, diet and other factors that may influence health, whether or not these have changed, because particular patterns may have positive or negative influences on health and illness.

Q. How long will the BWHS continue?

- A. This will be determined by how long the National Institutes of Health think the study is worth supporting, which depends on how long BWHS participants are willing to keep participating. The study, just approaching its 10th anniversary, has been extended for another five years. 10 years is not long for a follow-up study like the BWHS. The Framingham Heart Study, for example, has been in progress for over 50 years, and the Nurses' Health Study will soon celebrate its 30th year.

Q. Why does it take so long to get answers to scientific questions?

- A. Research is much more informative when large numbers of women with a particular illness can be studied. If 1000 women develop an illness in the course of 10 years of follow-up, we can learn much more about that illness than if 100 women develop it. The longer the follow-up, the greater the number of occurrences of illness there will be. The BWHS is studying a range of illnesses and outcomes. For rare illnesses, it might take 20 years for the study to provide informative results. For example, lupus affects black women much more commonly than white women, but it occurs relatively rarely. Also, the environment changes over time and there may be new factors that influence health.

Q. Why are only black women included in the BWHS?

- A. Until recently, black women were rarely included in health research studies. Before the BWHS began, there were three very large follow-up studies of white women in progress (involving about 300,000 women), but no large follow-up studies of black women. Also, black women are affected by certain illnesses more often than white women, for reasons that are not clear. Thus, there was and still is a clear need for research on the health of black women.

Q. How long will the information that we provide be kept confidential?

- A. It will always remain confidential. Your name will never be linked to the information that you have provided, even after the study is completed

FINDINGS FROM THE BWHS

The following articles or abstracts based on BWHS data have been published or accepted for publication in the last six months. You can read about them on the BWHS website www.bu.edu/bwhs/ or you can ask us to send you a copy of those that are of particular interest to you.

- *“Reproductive factors, hormonal contraception, and the risk of uterine leiomyomata (uterine fibroids) in African-American women: a prospective study”*
- *“Comparison of methods for collection of DNA samples by mail in the Black Women’s Health Study”*
- *“A prospective study of induced abortion and breast cancer in African-American women”*
- *“Influence of body size and body fat distribution on risk of uterine leiomyomata in U.S. black women”*
- *“Tobacco, alcohol, and coffee consumption and risk of uterine leiomyomata in the Black Women’s Health Study”*
- *“The Gail model as a diagnostic indicator in African-American women: truth or consequences” (Abstract)*
- *“Depressive symptoms by socio-economic characteristics in the Black Women’s Health Study” (Abstract)*
- *“Racial discrimination and breast cancer in Black women: the Black Women’s Health Study” (Abstract)*
- *“Neighborhood socioeconomic status and risk of hypertension in Black women” (Abstract)*
- *“Age-specific incidence rates for uterine leiomyomata in the Black Women’s Health Study” (Abstract)*
- *“A multilevel assessment of individual and neighborhood characteristics associated with smoking among Black women” (Abstract)*
- *“Hair relaxer use and the risk of preterm birth in the Black Women’s Health Study” (Abstract)*

News of BWHS participants and staff

Juanita Hope, BWHS research assistant, organized a team of BWHS staff and others who walked in the 20-mile Walk for Hunger on May 2. The team raised \$1,217 for food banks in 32 towns and cities in Massachusetts.

Alice Weathers, a BWHS participant, interviewed Lynn Rosenberg about the BWHS on WEOA (AM 1400) in Evansville, Indiana May 8 on her Saturday morning show, Drumbeat.

At the invitation of Sharon Henderson, a BWHS participant, Lynn Rosenberg spoke about the BWHS at the Black Women’s Health Summit in Worcester, Massachusetts on May 22. Sharon helped organize the Summit through the Worcester Healthy Start Program and the March of Dimes.