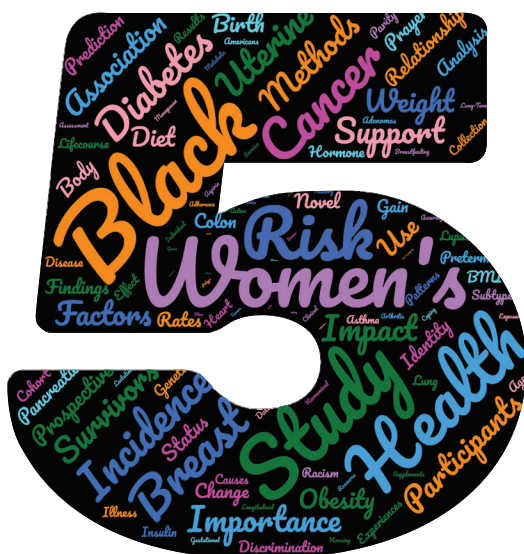


25 Years Together




- BWHS 25th Anniversary Webinar Series
- Cognitive research in the BWHS
- COVID-19 research in the BWHS
- Recently published findings from the BWHS
- Flu shots during the pandemic

CELEBRATING THE BWHS 25TH ANNIVERSARY: BWHS WEBINAR SERIES



In this 25th anniversary year of the BWHS, study investigators have presented two webinars. The first, on September 29, 2020, was about the purpose, methods, and future of the BWHS and described some important study findings. It was exciting as more than 1,100 participants

attended the webinar through Zoom and Facebook, with many streaming questions to the speakers. Please see page 3 of this newsletter for answers to some of the questions raised. The second webinar, about COVID-19, was held on November 5, 2020. It featured a panel discussion about the pandemic and described current BWHS research on COVID-19. Some early information from that research is reported on page 4 of this newsletter. In January, the third webinar in the series will explore breast cancer research in the BWHS. Visit www.bu.edu/bwhs/25thAnniversary for details and registration information; recordings of prior webinars are also posted. For future webinars, watch your inbox for emails from the BWHS with details, or check the study website every so often for updates. If you did not receive emails about the first two webinars and would like to hear about future webinars, please send us your email address and we will add you to the list. The website also includes a cooking video made for the BWHS by the Boston Medical Center Teaching Kitchen.

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Additional copies of this newsletter are available on a first come, first served basis.		

QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE WEBINARS

What has been the importance of the BWHS?

The BWHS is the largest epidemiologic study to focus on the health of Black women. Many researchers had thought that minority groups are reluctant to participate in medical/scientific research. BWHS participants have clearly demonstrated that Black women are not reluctant to participate. Indeed, the thousands of Black women in the study have embraced the opportunity to contribute to their own health and that of coming generations.

The BWHS has published hundreds of scientific papers in medical and scientific journals, presented findings at research and clinical conferences, and discussed them with the media. It takes many studies to establish or change the consensus about health and disease, and the BWHS has made numerous, important contributions to that process. For example, the BWHS was among the first to discover risk factors for the aggressive subtype of breast cancer (estrogen receptor negative) that preferentially affects Black women. The BWHS has reported on how foods we eat affect risk of diabetes and other conditions. The BWHS has documented the harmful health effects of experiences of racism. The BWHS has published multiple findings on lupus, uterine fibroids, and sarcoidosis. Results are available on the BWHS website www.bu.edu/bwhs/publications and are often described in newsletters.

What's next in the BWHS?

We have begun research on factors related to heart disease and stroke. We are continuing research on breast cancer, while adding a focus on the causes of colon cancer. We are conducting research on life after cancer. We are beginning to assess factors that affect cognition and memory.

While we hope that the current coronavirus pandemic will be controlled when safe and effective vaccines are in use, the BWHS will be involved in studying the long-term health effects of COVID-19.

How long will the BWHS continue?

BWHS investigators are devoted to continuing the study. As long as participants and the funders remain committed, the BWHS will continue. There is still so much to learn.

CURRENT RESEARCH

COVID-19

Dr. Yvette Cozier of the BWHS and Dr. Michelle Albert, a cardiologist at the University of California at San Francisco, are leading a study of the COVID-19 in the BWHS. They presented a webinar on COVID-19 on November 5, 2020 and were joined by Dr. Linda Clayton, BWHS Advisory Board member, who provided a historical perspective, and Dr. Ellen Grant, BWHS participant and Advisory Board member, who provided a mental health perspective (recording available at www.bu.edu/bwhs/25thAnniversary). The BWHS COVID-19 study is funded by the American Heart Association and is being conducted online, which is cost-effective and allows for fast delivery of questionnaires to participants and quick responses. Over 10,000 participants have completed the baseline questionnaire, of whom 232 reported a positive COVID-19 test and 45 were hospitalized. Almost 600 other participants had symptoms of COVID but were not tested. The investigators are particularly interested in how COVID-19 and its treatment, or lack of treatment, affect risk of developing heart disease.

Research on Cognition



The average age in the BWHS is now 63. Cognition (the ability to think and remember) tends to decline as people age, and some develop Alzheimer's Disease or other forms of dementia. Studies have shown that long-term stress is associated with greater cognitive decline. In the first study of cognition in the BWHS, Dr. Patricia Coogan assessed participants' perceived experiences of racism in relation to a cognition score that was measured by six questions included on the 2015 questionnaire

(for example, "Do you have more trouble than usual remembering a short list of items?") Women who reported more experiences of racism were found to have poorer cognition scores. The study results are evidence for a harmful effect of experiences of racism on cognition. *Coogan et al., Experiences of racism and subjective cognitive function in African American women. Alzheimers Dement (Amst) 2020.*

In an ongoing BWHS study of cognition, we have identified over 1,000 participants aged 65 or older diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease or related dementias. The next step is to assess the relation of experiences of racism to Alzheimer's Disease. The BWHS has also started a "pilot study" to see if participants are willing to use an app, called DANA, on their smart phones. DANA contains "brain games". If participants are willing to spend 15 minutes taking these short brain health assessments every year or so, this might be a simple way to follow them for changes in cognition. The hope is that if cognitive changes related to a higher risk of dementia can be identified very early, treatments will be more effective.

A photograph of three people walking outdoors in winter. They are all wearing face masks and winter clothing. The person on the left is wearing a blue jacket, a pink beanie, and a white face mask. The person in the middle is wearing a grey hoodie, black gloves, and a black face mask. The person on the right is wearing a blue jacket, a purple beanie, and a black face mask. They are all walking towards the camera.

Dr. Shanshan (Li) Sheehy, women who engaged in strenuous exercise like aerobics, and less strenuous exercise like walking, lived longer than women who reported no exercise. Walking at a pace of 2 or more miles an hour for a few hours a week seemed just about as good as exercising strenuously for the same amount of time. Since exercise seems to reduce the risk of many conditions, it's a great idea to get out several times every week and do your favorite moves. *Li et al. Physical activity and mortality among African American Women. Am J Prev Med (in press, 2020).*



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CURRENT RESEARCH

Aspirin and Breast Cancer

Dr. Kimberly Bertrand examined aspirin use in relation to breast cancer in the BWHS. Aspirin has anti-inflammatory properties and inflammation can play a role in cancer development. In the BWHS, aspirin use was associated with a small reduction in risk of breast cancer that is estrogen receptor negative. If these results are confirmed in other studies, additional research will be needed to understand what dosages of aspirin are helpful, since aspirin can lead to gastric bleeding in some people. *Bertrand et al. Aspirin use and risk of breast cancer in African American women. Breast Cancer Res 2020.*

Red and processed meat and pancreatic cancer

Early in the BWHS, participants reported on their usual diet by marking how often they ate any of a long list of foods. This information has been very useful for understanding the relationship between what we eat and our health. Recently, Dr. Jessica Petrick examined diet in relation to the chances of developing pancreatic cancer. Participants who ate the most meat (at least 3 servings a week) had a higher risk of pancreatic cancer than women who ate less than one serving a week. This cancer, though rare, is very deadly. Cutting down on red meat consumption is a good idea! *Petrick et al. A prospective analysis of intake of red and processed meat in relation to pancreatic cancer among African American women. Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev 2020.*

FLU SHOTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is trying to get the word to everyone that it is important to get a flu shot, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. "Everyone" means all individuals who have not had a severe life-threatening reaction to a previous flu shot. People 65 years or older may want to get the higher dose shot. Both the coronavirus and the flu attack the lungs, so it is important to avoid getting both illnesses at once.



At the time this newsletter is going to press, some COVID-19 vaccines have been approved. Much misinformation has been spread about the virus and potential vaccines. The best informed advice as to what to do is available from scientists and infectious disease experts, such as those at the CDC ([cdc.gov/coronavirus2019-ncov/vaccines](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus2019-ncov/vaccines)) or the National Institutes of Health ([nih.gov/coronavirus](https://www.nih.gov/coronavirus)). **Be well!**



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