

# Heart Failure Affects Black Adults Almost 14 Years Earlier Than White Adults

Disparities in insurance, unemployment and education levels contribute to increased rates of heart failure.

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A Northwestern Medicine study found that Black adults in the United States are hospitalized with [heart failure](#) almost 14 years earlier than white adults, according to a [news release](#).

Cardiovascular disease (CVD)—including [heart disease](#), heart failure and [stroke](#)—is the leading cause of death in the United States.

Heart failure, which affects over 6 million Americans, occurs when a person's [heart](#) does not pump as strongly as it should and, as a result, their body doesn't get the right amount of blood and oxygen. This weakened pumping action can cause fluid to back up in the lungs and elsewhere in the body.

For the study, published in the [Journal of the American College of Cardiology](#), researchers analyzed data on more than 42,000 individuals from hundreds of U.S. hospitals.

On average, white adults were first hospitalized for heart failure at age 73.6, Asian Americans at 70.6, Latinos at 65.4 and Black Americans at 60.1, according to the release.

“These are striking differences, especially for Black patients,” said study first author Xiaoning Huang, PhD, research assistant professor of cardiology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, in the release.

These differences may be attributed to social and economic factors such as whether people had

health insurance or lived in neighborhoods with high unemployment rates as well as the level of education in their communities.

“Our study shows that social risk factors, including insurance status and area-level educational and economic opportunities, played a major role,” Huang said. “These factors often limit people’s access to quality health care and shape people’s health long before they develop heart problems.”

In general, Black Americans have a higher risk for [high blood pressure](#) and [diabetes](#), both of which greatly increase a person’s risk for CVD. Black adults are also more likely to experience more serious cases of heart failure and experience heart failure at a younger age, according to the [National Institutes of Health](#).

Researchers emphasize the need for better CVD prevention and routine screening to eliminate these disparities. They also encourage individuals to learn about common risk factors for heart failure, including aging, family history and lifestyle habits such as smoking, unhealthy diet, heavy alcohol use and lack of physical activity.

“Raising awareness is the first step toward advocating for policies that ensure everyone has educational and economic opportunities, healthy food, affordable and high-quality care and freedom from discrimination so that neither your ZIP code nor your racial background determines how soon you face serious heart problems,” Huang said.

To learn more, click [#Heart Failure](#) or read Real Health’s [Basics on Heart Health](#). It reads in part:

The main function of the heart is to pump blood through the body. Each day, this organ pushes about 10 pints of blood through the blood vessels in the body. When the heart pumps, the organ pushes blood into the lungs to load up on oxygen and then pumps this oxygen-rich blood through arteries in the blood vessels to all other parts of our bodies. Veins in the blood vessels take blood back to the heart so the organ can pump the blood back to the lungs to, once again, pick up oxygen and repeat the cycle.

As the engine that pumps blood to all parts of the body, the heart is crucial to keeping us alive. But many diseases and conditions put your heart’s health at risk.

Those conditions include arrhythmia, high cholesterol levels, congenital heart disease, diabetes, heart attack, heart failure, high blood pressure, kidney disease, metabolic syndrome, obesity, peripheral artery disease (PAD) and stroke, among others. Heart disease, in turn, affects the body in many ways and can trigger other conditions, such as cognitive impairment

that can lead to Alzheimer's disease.

What are the risk factors for cardiovascular disease?

Many factors can influence your risk for heart disease. Some can be controlled, others can't. Some factors greatly increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, whereas others may exert only a mild influence. Knowing your various risk factors and their combined effect can help you and your health care provider determine your overall risk for cardiovascular disease.

What risk factors can't be controlled?

Both gender and age exert strong effects on cardiovascular health. Generally, men have a greater risk than women and at an earlier age. For men, risk begins to increase by age 45 and continues to grow with each passing year. For women, the risk generally doesn't start to climb until after menopause. By age 65, however, the cardiovascular disease risk in women escalates substantially.

Race also plays a role in heart health, though it isn't entirely clear why. In general, African Americans have a higher risk for health problems such as high blood pressure and diabetes. These two health problems greatly increase a person's risk for cardiovascular disease.