
**Why Most Physical Activity Interventions for African American
Women Have Failed: Three Short Answers**

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The last decade has been a rich and productive period for developing and testing behavior modification interventions for preventing coronary heart disease. Some of the most intensive research has been conducted in the area of lifestyle change, including physical activity and nutrition. African American women bear a disproportionate burden of heart disease and consistently rate among the highest with respect to these two behavioral risk factors. Notwithstanding a recent focus on ethnic-specific behavioral change, few physical activity interventions have produced demonstrable and sustainable results for African American women.

What are we doing wrong?

Answer One: Few physical activity interventions have been designed to specifically address African American women within their own cultural context.

Answer Two: Most program designers fail to understand and underestimate the multitude and complexity of barriers encountered by African American women trying to make lifestyle changes.

Answer Three: Lifestyle behavior choices, such as when, where and how to exercise, are influenced more by the external contexts within which choices are made than by individual will. This presentation will discuss the need to move away from current individual-level risk factor reduction and return to more traditional public health solutions, including socio-structural approaches that create supportive environments in which African American women can be physically active. This review will examine the intervention research literature on strategies for increasing physical activity among African American women and discuss ongoing qualitative research findings.