

Why BP must be top of mind at every Black woman's doctor visit

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Timothy M. Smith

Senior News Writer

Hypertension is wreaking havoc on the Black population in the U.S. Case in point: More than 50% of Black women over the age of 20 have high blood pressure. But a silver lining in that statistic is Black women often make critical health care decisions and food choices for their families. Changing their understanding of the issue can help transform entire communities.

The AMA—in collaboration with the AMA Foundation, Association of Black Cardiologists, American Heart Association, Minority Health Institute and National Medical Association—launched the “Release the Pressure” (RTP) campaign in 2020 to give Black women the resources they need to measure and track their BP numbers, as well as make healthy lifestyle changes for themselves and their families.

The campaign held a live online event, “Why Heart Health Matters,” in partnership with the Delta Research and Educational Foundation to emphasize the importance of Black women to their communities and outline the top-level messages about hypertension to share with them, no matter a physician's specialty.

The Delta Research and Educational Foundation is a public charity, founded by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., that supports scholastic achievement, public service programs and research initiatives focused on Black women.

Share these messages with patients

The theme of the event was education with presenters focusing on these key topics:

Know what high BP looks like. “The first step is to actually know your blood pressure,” said Yvonne Commodore-Mensah, PhD, MHS, RN, a cardiovascular nurse epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing in Baltimore. She also noted that blood pressure is typically considered elevated when the

top number is 120 to 129 and the bottom number is less than 80, but it is high when the systolic (top number) is 130 or higher or the diastolic (bottom number) is 80 or higher.

Learn how to measure your BP at home. “One of the best investments that you can make in yourself is to actually invest in a validated home blood pressure device,” Commodore-Mensah said, adding that [validatebp.org](https://www.validatebp.org) is the recommended source for validated devices in the U.S..

Take your medications as prescribed. “These medications work,” she added. “I’ve seen it firsthand.”

Track your progress. The Release the Pressure website features a [seven-day recording log](#) with two slots for each morning and evening. It also includes instructions for accurately measuring BP at home, with a graphic and video.

Know what you’re trying to do. The most important part of the [RTP Heart Health Pledge](#), which is a cornerstone of the Release the Pressure campaign, is creating a heart health plan, said Rachel Villanueva, MD, a clinical assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine and the 122nd president of the National Medical Association.

“It is really so important to find a health home—a health care provider who knows you well, knows your family history,” she advised. Release the Pressure is dedicated to introducing Black women to health care providers who look like them through its regular events.

Make healthy lifestyle changes. Target at least two and a half hours of walking per week, for example. “Really working your heart improves your heart health,” Dr. Villanueva said. “Twenty, 30 minutes a day—just get outside. Put that on your schedule right away so there’s nothing that that conflicts with it.”

Lean on these resources

The Release the Pressure campaign encourages Black women to [take the pledge](#) to lower their blood pressure, as well as to set a goal, monitor their BP at home, activate a personalized wellness plan and join a “squad” of women committed to putting their heart health first.

The AMA has created a [toolkit](#) to help health professionals raise awareness of the Release the Pressure campaign and ensure every American has access to the conditions, resources and opportunities to achieve optimal BP.