

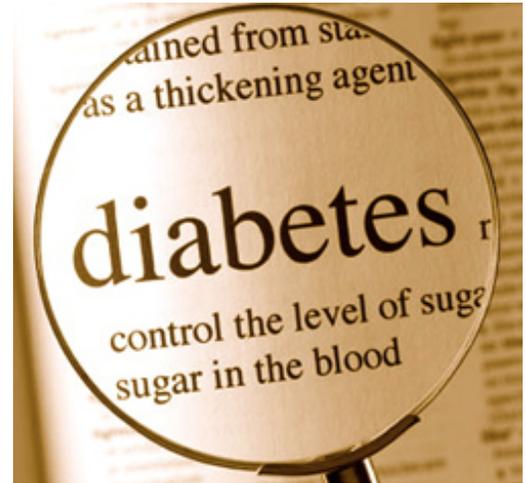
Experts at Hampton U. urge risk control for heart attack, stroke

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By Malik Jones

This year's Black Family Conference theme was healthcare within the African-American community. Hampton University professors and established experts in medical and pharmaceutical fields came together to inform students and the community of the different health risks plaguing blacks and minorities across the country. In the panel titled, "Risk Control for Heart Attack and Stroke," Assistant Professors **David Ombengi** and Hua Ling gave the audience tips on how to prevent diseases such as diabetes, coronary artery disease, and how to take charge and responsibility for one's own health. First and foremost, **what exactly is diabetes?**



Diabetes is a group of medical conditions that cause dangerously high levels of blood glucose. This can result in the damage, dysfunction, and failure of major organs such as the eyes, kidneys, heart, brain, and nerves. If left untreated, diabetics could be forced to lose their extremities such as arms and legs when they lose feeling in them due to nerve damage.

Diabetics, said the presenters, are also at a much higher risk for heart attacks and strokes. Depending on the type of diabetes, a person may be deficient in insulin, which works to keep our blood sugar levels from going too high. Without this hormone, glucose levels will rise and build up in the bloodstream, creating blockage. When blood flow is disrupted, necessary oxygen cannot get to the heart or brain resulting in these major and life-threatening malfunctions.

In a 2013 study on the leading causes of death within the United States, diabetes **placed seventh** with over 75,000 cases in the U.S. alone. 65 percent of people with diabetes are likely to die from heart attack or stroke. This disease is especially prevalent within minority communities. Poor socioeconomic status can have more detrimental effects than what schools people go to or what jobs they have. It can also have a huge impact on their health. Less access to quality care facilities, inability to afford healthier foods, and access to medical insurance are all risk factors that can have a negative domino effect on a person's health.

However, as Ombengi explained, "Diabetes is not a death sentence; it is treatable and preventable."

Some risk factors that people can control include: blood pressure and blood sugar levels, smoking/alcohol consumption, and exercise habits. Not many

life-threatening diseases can be prevented before they occur. Diabetes can be by simply staying vigilant over what people eat and how much they stay active. Having a game plan for health is important and could just save lives before it's ever a risk.

Hua Ling talked more in depth about risks surrounding the heart, specifically looking at the warning signs of Heart Disease and Stroke.

The term Atherosclerosis describes the buildup of fat deposits, or plaque, within the coronary arteries. This plaque is the result of fatty, sugary foods, which then builds up and stiffens the artery walls, making blood flow increasingly difficult. Researchers now know that plaque deposits can begin as early as 2-years-old. Once in the system, plaque cannot be removed. This realization only emphasizes the need for balanced nutrition and exercise at a young age.

Symptoms of heart disease may not be obvious for a very long time. There could be some minor chest pain similar to that of a muscle ache. However, if the pain intensifies and people do not seek treatment, this could lead to serious consequences and even sudden death.

In the **2013 study** on the leading causes of death in the U.S., heart disease led the pack with roughly 611,105 cases.

Stroke came in at No. 5 with 128,978 cases. 85 percent of all strokes are Ischemic strokes. This is caused when plaque builds in an artery, the blood clots together, and oxygen is cut off from that part of the brain, similar to Atherosclerosis in the heart.

Ling highlighted tips for spotting a stroke, including: drooping facial features or an inability to smile, inability to hold arms outstretched, and slurred or difficult speech. These signs indicate that some portion of the brain is currently being affected and the normal nerve signals are being disrupted. The faster you can identify the problem and seek treatment, the less permanent damage may be done to the brain.

So now the question becomes, "What can we do to prevent all these health problems?" The answer is to reduce all the things that put bodies at risk. Monitor cholesterol levels, diet, exercise, and see a physician regularly to evaluate your progress and get more information. Americans can all take charge of their lives and health, one person, one family, and one community at a time.

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