



*Heart of Gold:* Heart Health from the Postpartum Period and Beyond  
**FAQs: What You Need to Know**  
(From ABC's Heart of Gold Table Talk)

**Program Chairs:** Annette Ansong, MD; Rachel M. Bond, MD; Mary Branch, MD, MS; and Joyce Njoroge, MD

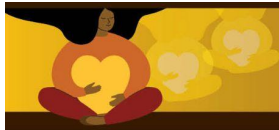
Association of Black Cardiologists

## Cardiovascular disease is complex in women, and we all need to be educated about the risks.

- Nearly 50% of Black women develop heart disease including: hypertension, stroke, heart failure and heart attacks.
- Black women are more likely to develop heart disease at earlier ages and are more likely to die from heart disease than White women.
- Statistics show that maternal mortality as well as the future implication of developing heart disease is significantly higher in Black women than White women.

### Why are Black women more likely to have complications during pregnancy and delivery? And, how does this impact their future health?

- Race, ethnicity, and social determinants of health can increase the risk of developing cardiovascular complications of pregnancy such as:
  - Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy including preeclampsia and eclampsia
  - Gestational diabetes
  - Peripartum cardiomyopathies;
  - Preterm labor;
  - A C-section (or cesarean section); and
  - Low birth weight babies.
- The above pregnancy complications and the following factors increase the risks of developing future heart disease:
  - Advanced maternal age (pregnancies after the age of 35);
  - Obesity;
  - High blood pressure;
  - Diabetes;
  - Tobacco use; and
  - A sedentary lifestyle and poor diet.



## FAQs: What You Need to Know

(From ABC's Heart of Gold Table Talk)

Association of Black Cardiologists

### **What is the Superwoman phenomenon and how does it affect the health of Black women?**

The Black Superwoman Schema is an internalized chronic stressor on Black women resulting in the expectation of taking on life's obstacles independently without support and has been shown to result in premature chronic disease development such as heart disease.

### **What should I do if I've had complications during pregnancy?**

It is important to realize immediate complications of pregnancy, especially cardiovascular complications, can occur up to one year after delivery - and can result in future risks as well. From the "5th trimester" period through post-menopause, many women do not seek regular healthcare follow up for themselves and may develop heart disease that goes undetected for several years. So checking in with a healthcare provider on a regular basis is crucial.

### **What is Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection (SCAD) and why should women be concerned about it?**

Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection (SCAD) is an important consideration that is often overlooked due to its rarity and the poor appreciation of risk in women with recent pregnancy. Management should be determined by a cardiologist as part of the healthcare team.

### **Is early menopause a risk factor for heart disease?**

- Early menopause has been associated with cardiovascular disease risk. The average age of menopause is around 50 years of age and menopause is considered early when it happens at 45 years of age or younger.
- African American women are at risk for early menopause which may be related to epigenetic changes (DNA changes after birth).
- Epigenetic changes can be influenced by societal stress and unhealthy living.

### **Does hormone therapy (HT) increase a woman's risk for heart disease?**

- There is an increased risk of heart disease if hormone therapy is started 10 years after the onset of menopause or at 60 years of age or older.
- It is recommended that women use the lowest effective dose for the shortest duration possible, to minimize any potential risks.
- If you have a history of heart disease or risk factors, consider discussing with a cardiologist before taking.



## FAQs: What You Need to Know

(From ABC's Heart of Gold Table Talk)

Association of Black Cardiologists

### What is the connection between heart disease and breast cancer?

- In addition to the increased risk of heart disease, breast cancer is a disease with intersecting risk factors such as obesity, smoking, sedentary lifestyle.
- Hormone therapy can also increase your risk for both breast cancer and heart disease.
- Additionally, certain chemotherapy agents can damage the heart muscle leading to heart pumping dysfunction and heart failure, also known as cardiotoxicity.
- African American women have a three fold increased risk of cardiotoxicity and the cause is unknown.
- Hypertension plays a big role in increasing the risk of cardiotoxicity. This is especially important for African American women to be aware of.

### What steps can be taken to prevent or mitigate risk factors for heart disease and breast cancer?

Practicing the American Heart Association's "[Life's Simple 7](#)" can help prevent heart disease and breast cancer:

1. Manage Blood Pressure
2. Control Cholesterol
3. Reduce Blood Sugar
4. Get Active
5. Eat Better
6. Lose Weight
7. Stop Smoking

Likewise, using the ABC's patient resource guide, "[7 Steps to a Healthy Heart](#)," can help with the management of stress and encourage more wellness visits for earlier detection of heart disease and other issues such as breast cancer:

1. Access Better Healthcare
2. Take Charge of Your Blood Pressure
3. Control Your Cholesterol
4. Track Your Blood Sugar
5. Don't Use Tobacco
6. Eat Smart and Enjoy Regular Exercise
7. Be Spiritually Active and Reduce Stress