

# Blacks at higher risk of getting cancer

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN  
Community News Editor

Did you know that cancer is among the leading causes of death among African-Americans? According to *The 1991 Community Diagnosis* compiled by the Forsyth County Health Department, between the years of 1986 and 1990, nearly 400 minority men and women per 100,000 people in the Forsyth County population died from cancer, compared to nearly 300 white men and women.

The main forms of cancer deaths in Forsyth County were Tra-

chea, Bronchus, Lung, and Breast Cancer. Those deaths ranked second to deaths caused by heart disease. However, according to officials at the Forsyth County Health Department, getting the African-American community to understand the importance of preventing the development of cancer by living a healthy life has not been easy.

Jan Hinton, an adult health educator at the Health Department, says many times she has encountered people who have the attitude that since they're going to die anyway, they may as well die from something.

"And the good news is there's so many things that can be done about cancer; early detection-wise especially.

"In some of the programs that we have done, when you ask health concerns that people have and someone mentions cancer, you get this whole attitude of defeated," she said. "You need to just accept it, and that's just a part of life because you're going to die from it." And there are so many options available today with early detection being one of the main things.

The numbers of African-Americans that develop and die from the

various types of cancer is steadily increasing, although in Forsyth County, the death rate pretty much follows the state and national trends. Hinton says that it is important for everyone, especially African-Americans, to realize the significance of those numbers. "If we can create some awareness, (we can let people know) that it is serious. There are some things you can do like pay attention to your body. If there are any changes, that should send up a little red flag.

(The following information is provided by the National Cancer Institute.)

### Tips on how to quit smoking:

1. Determine when and why you smoke.
2. Change your smoking routines by keeping your cigarettes in a different place and/or smoking with your other hand.
3. Smoke only in certain designated places, like outdoors.
4. Buy one pack of cigarettes at a time. Switch to a brand you don't like.
5. Set a date for quitting. If you can, have a friend quit smoking with you.

### Once you quit:

1. Stay busy.
2. Get rid of all your cigarettes. Wet them down so you can't smoke them. Put away your ashtrays.
3. When you get the urge to smoke, do something else.
4. Chew gum.
5. Reward yourself at the end of the day for not smoking.
6. Try to exercise.
7. Start a money jar with the money you would normally spend on cigarettes.

## LUNG CANCER

Lung cancer is the leading cause of death in the United States, and is most often caused by cigarette smoking. Smoking has been consistently higher among African-American men than white men. According to 1987 statistics, 41% of black men smoke, compared to 31% of white men. Over 15,000 African-Americans are expected to die from lung cancer this year.

However, although African-American men smoke less cigarettes per day, they are more likely to use cigarettes that contain a higher tar and nicotine content. This, according to experts, is why black men develop lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases, at a much higher rate than their white counterparts.

As for African-American

women, lung cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death, following breast cancer. And because the number of women who have quit smoking has not decreased at a substantial rate, it is believed that eventually, the number of women smokers will surpass that of men.

People who do not smoke, however, are also at risk of developing lung cancer, especially those who have spouses that smoke. Non-smokers who have spouses that smoke are twice as likely to develop lung cancer than individuals who do not smoke and have spouses who also do not smoke.

So what's the best way to prevent lung cancer? Don't smoke, or stop smoking immediately. The risks of developing lung cancer gradually decrease once a person stops smoking. If you need help to quit smoking, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

## BREAST CANCER

Between 1986 and 1990, the number of African-American women who died from breast cancer in Forsyth County was 27.4 per 100,000 population, according to the Forsyth County Health Department. During the same period, the number among white women was 20.1. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death for African-American women, although all women are at risk of developing the disease, including those who have no family history of it. Eighty percent of women who develop breast cancer have no family history of the disease.

The most common warning signs of breast cancer are a lump or thickening in the breast, a change in the shape or size of the breast, discharge from the nipple, or a change in the color or texture of the skin of the breast or the skin around the nipple. Many times, however, there are no specific signs of breast cancer until the disease has reached its advanced stages.

The most effective way to detect breast cancer before it reaches the advanced stages is by undergoing mammography, a special x-ray technique. Mammography can detect a lump up to two years before it can be felt. But very few African-American women are

aware of or take advantage of mammographies. According to statistics, only 58% of black women age 40 and older have ever had a mammogram to detect breast cancer, compared to 65% of all white women in the same age group.

Just what is mammography? During mammography, two pictures are taken of each breast — one from the side, the other from the top. The breasts are placed between plastic plates and slightly flattened to ensure a clear picture. The procedure is not painful, although it may be a little uncomfortable.

The National Cancer Institute and other leading medical organizations recommend that as soon as

women turn 40, they should have a mammogram every one to two years, and an annual breast exam by a doctor. Beginning at age 50, women should have mammograms yearly, along with the annual breast exams. Women are also encouraged to learn how to do monthly breast self-examinations.

Nearly 90% of women whose breast cancer is found and treated early, survive. And often times, the breast itself can be saved if the lump is detected early.

## CERVICAL CANCER

African-American women are about three times more likely to develop cervical cancer than their white counterparts, and twice as likely to die from it. All women aged 18 and up are at risk of developing the disease, especially those who are sexually active.

The best form of early detection is by having a Pap test done, also called a Pap Smear. It can show whether or not an infection, inflammation, abnormal cells, or cancer in the cervix is present. Cervical cancer deaths can be prevented if the disease is detected early.

Women should get a Pap test done every year, especially older women. "As women get older and they think 'Well I'm not going to have anymore children,' then they stop having pap smears, and they're just as susceptible to cervical cancer," said Hinton.

During a Pap test, a doctor or nurse takes some cells from a woman's cervix with a cotton swab. Those cells are then examined, and if there are any abnormalities, your doctor informs you and suggests follow-up procedures.

## DIET AND NUTRITION

A number of studies have shown that there is a connection between certain foods and the risk of developing certain cancers. In fact, some experts believe that what we eat may be related to 35% of cancer deaths.

Eating foods with a high fat content may increase the risk of developing breast, colon, and prostate cancers. Not eating enough foods with fiber can increase the risk of colon cancer.

To prevent developing those types of cancers, a healthy diet should be incorporated into the normal daily routine. A healthy diet consists of lean cuts of meat, low-fat dairy products, more seafood, less fried foods, and more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The

National Cancer Institute recommends that individuals, especially African-Americans, eat at least five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Only about one in 10 Americans eat enough fruits and vegetables daily, and African-Americans eat less fruits and vegetables than white Americans.

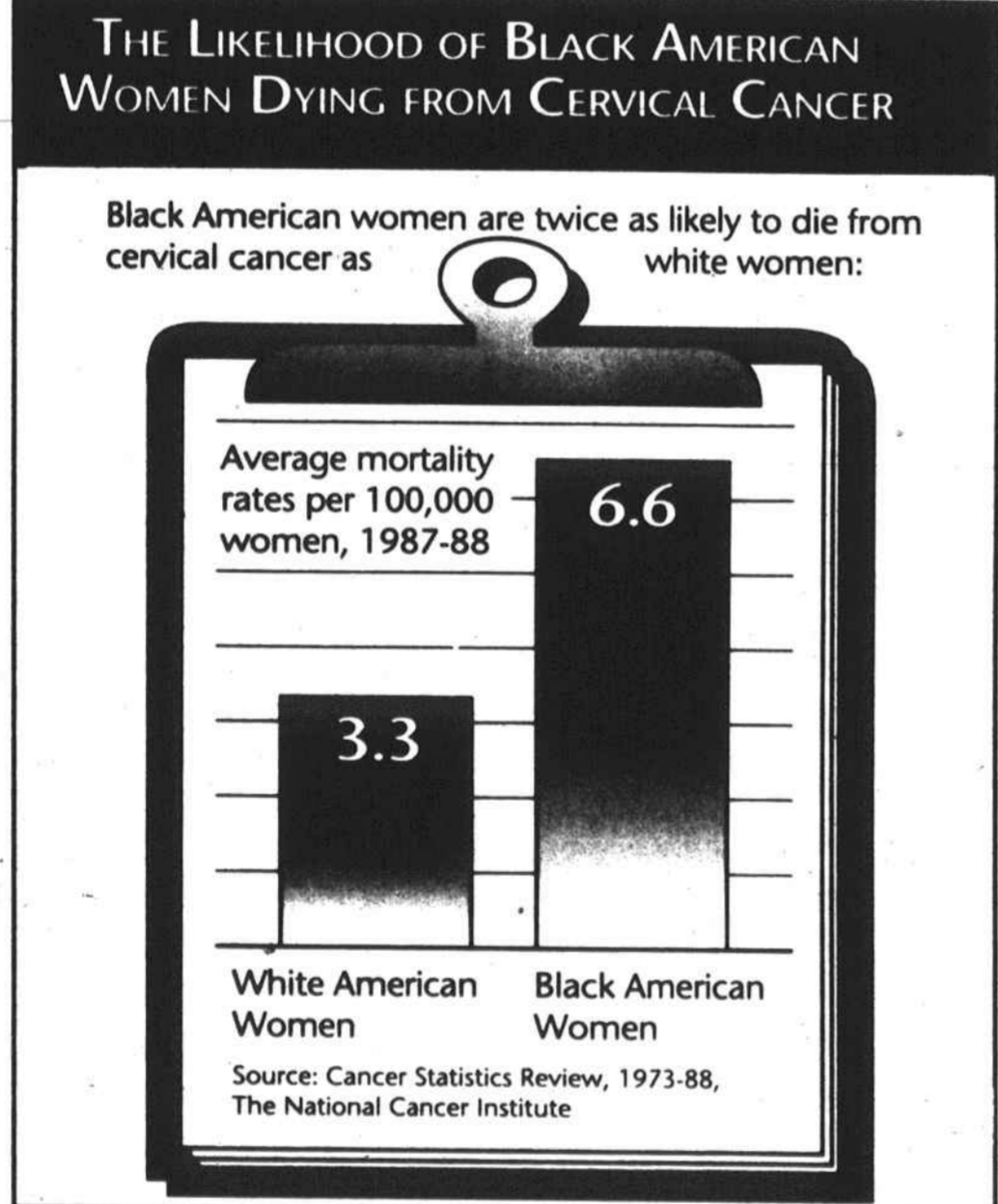
Also, many traditional African-American dishes protect against some cancers. Foods such as collards, mustard greens, kale and spinach are all recommended for a healthy diet.

The way in which food is cooked also plays an important part in healthy eating. For example, instead of using fatback to season vegetables, low-fat meats such as turkey parts can be used. When eating chicken, remove the skin and broil or bake it, instead of frying.

Broiling or baking fish is also recommended instead of frying. By broiling and baking foods, instead of frying, the amount of fat in one's diet is greatly reduced, as well as the risk of developing breast, colon and prostate cancers.

Hinton stated that people should also be careful when eating out. "A lot of people say, 'Well I'll just go to Wendy's and get a salad, or I'll just get a baked potato.' The baked potato itself is great. There are a lot of vitamins in there. But when you go and put that sour cream on top of it and the butter, and everything else, you might as well have ordered a single, for what you're getting, which is a lot of fat," she explained.

For more information, call the National Cancer Institute's toll-free number at 1-800-4-CANCER.



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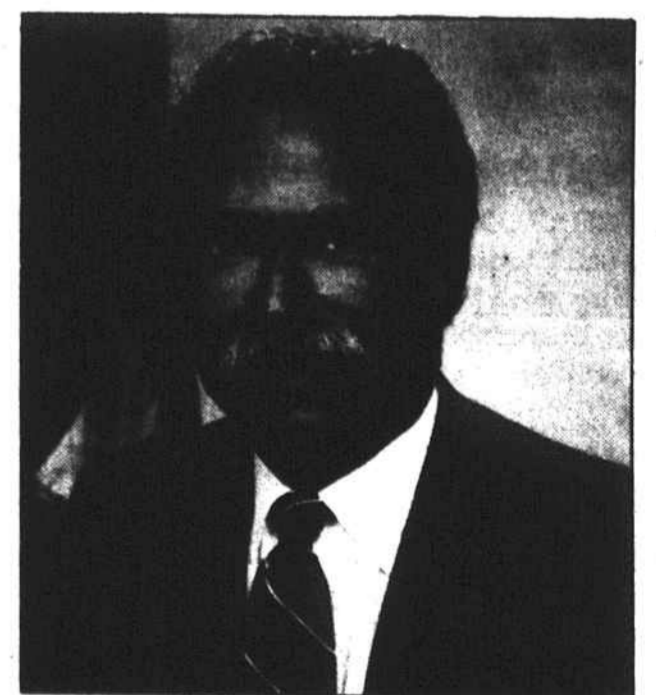
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