

# Why 7 Deadly Diseases Strike Blacks Most, © 2005 WebMD, Inc. All rights reserved

Health care disparities heighten disease differences between African-Americans and white Americans.

Several deadly diseases strike black Americans harder and more often than they do white Americans.

Fighting back means genetic research. It means changing the system for testing new drugs. It means improving health education. It means overcoming disparities in [health care](#). It means investments targeted to the health of black Americans. And the evidence so far indicates that these investments will pay health dividends not just for racial minorities, but for everyone.

“Yet we are closer to the beginning of the fight than to the end”. Why?

Genes definitely play a role. So does the environment in which people live, socioeconomic status -- and, yes, racism, says Clyde W. Yancy, MD, associate dean of clinical affairs and medical director for [heart failure](#)/transplantation at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

Some numbers

- [Diabetes](#) is 60% more common in black Americans than in white Americans. **Blacks are up to 2.5 times more likely to suffer a limb [amputation](#) and up to 5.6 times more likely to suffer [kidney disease](#) than other people with [diabetes](#).**
- **African-Americans are three times more likely to die of [asthma](#) than white Americans.**
- Deaths from [lung](#) scarring -- [sarcoidosis](#) -- are **16 times more common among blacks than among whites**. The disease recently (2004) killed former NFL star Reggie White at age 43.
- Despite lower [tobacco](#) exposure, **black men are 50% more likely than white men to get [lung cancer](#).**
- **Strokes kill 4 times more 35- to 54-year-old black Americans than white Americans**. Blacks have nearly twice the first-time [stroke](#) risk of whites.
- Blacks develop [high blood pressure](#) earlier in life -- and with much higher [blood pressure](#) levels -- than whites. **Nearly 42% of black men and more than 45% of black women aged 20 and older have [high blood pressure](#).**
- [Cancer treatment](#) is equally successful for all races. **Yet black men have a 40% higher [cancer](#) death rate than white men. African-American women have a 20% higher [cancer](#) death rate than white women.**