

# Women's Health Awareness Newsletter

## Embark Upon Your Journey to a Healthier You!

Spring 2020 / Issue 2

Dear Women's Health Awareness Participant,

We thank you for your support of Women's Health Awareness.

In keeping with the spirit of health awareness, and as part of preparedness to protect the health of the public during this time of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has requested that all large meetings and symposia that are not mission critical over the next 30 days either be postponed or cancelled.

Therefore, as a part of NIH, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) is following this directive and **postponing Women's Health Awareness (WHA) scheduled for April 4, 2020, until further notice**. We will keep you apprised of a new date as soon as we learn more.

We hope you will consider participating in the rescheduled WHA. We will notify you well in advance of the rescheduled event date. Through this newsletter, we would like to keep you connected to women's health awareness and present you with essential health education topics to provide you with valuable health information.

Given the spread of COVID-19 to the United States, it is vital to stay informed about this virus and take the steps to protect you and your family. To learn more, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information page at: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov).

### *How do I prepare my home? Go to the CDC link: "Get Your Home Ready"*

#### **Here are some quick tips for how you can remain healthy during this pandemic:**

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Be sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Practice social distancing. This means when you are out in public put distance between yourself and others (at least six feet apart).



Warmest and best regards,

#### **Joan Packenham, Ph.D.**

Chair and Founder of Women's Health Awareness  
Director, Office of Human Research Compliance,  
Program Director, Women's Environmental Health Initiative  
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences  
National Institute of Health, Department of Health and Human Services



#### **Take Steps to Protect Others:**

- Stay home if you are sick.
- If you have a fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call your doctor.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and dispose immediately in a lined trash can.
- Stay home and be mindful and cautious if you are a caregiver of an individual with a weak immune system or if you take care of an elderly relative as they are the most vulnerable population to this virus.

Be sure to take the necessary steps to protect yourself and others from being exposed to COVID-19. Prepare, be safe, and stay healthy.

**COVID 19**  
CORONAVIRUS DISEASE


**CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)**

**SYMPTOMS\* OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE**

**Patients with COVID-19 have reportedly had mild to severe respiratory illness. Symptoms can include**

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

**\* Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.**



[www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)

## HOT HEALTH TOPICS

### Black Americans and Opioids

#### *A 'Rare Case Where Racial Biases' Protected African Americans*

Stereotypes can be prevalent and harmful, even if implicit. Researchers believe that racial stereotypes embedded within the American medical system provided a layer of protection for African Americans some 20 years ago when the opioid crisis began to escalate. These negative stereotypes resulted in fewer opioid prescriptions, which meant possibly fewer deaths. An analysis projects that had mortality rates related to prescription opioids for black Americans been equivalent to that of white Americans, around 14,000 black Americans would have died.

Starting in the 1990s, marketing for new prescription opioids was more aggressive in white rural areas. Interestingly, pain drug prescriptions were already high in those areas. On the other hand, fewer opioid prescriptions were received by black Americans. Some researchers think this was because doctors believed black Americans were more likely to become addicted to the drugs, more likely to sell the drugs, and were biologically different thereby having a higher pain threshold than white people. Needless to say, this was contrary to fact. Additionally, researchers think it is possible that some white doctors were less empathic to the pain of people who were not like them and more empathetic to those who were.

Two decades ago, prescription opioid-related mortality rates were relatively similar for black and white Americans. But research reports that by 2010, the rates were two times higher for whites than for African Americans. While African Americans were less likely to become addicted to opioid prescriptions because they were less likely to receive them, they were also more likely to endure unnecessary and excruciating pain for illnesses like cancer. African Americans have endured a long history of harm from inferior health care, including infamous episodes like the Tuskegee study. And this accidental benefit of fewer opioid-related mortality rates does not remedy the way damaging stereotypes continue to influence aspects of medical practice today.

[www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/upshot/opioid-epidemic-blacks.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/upshot/opioid-epidemic-blacks.html)



## NUTRITION CORNER

Did you know that spinach and eggs can be a good alternative for breakfast if you don't like sweet breakfast foods, such as cereal or pancakes? Eggs offer high-quality protein and spinach provides a range of essential minerals and vitamins. An egg and spinach breakfast can provide a variety of health benefits as part of a balanced diet and can help you meet your daily nutrient recommendations. Spinach is high in calcium, iron, magnesium, and vitamin A. Eggs contain vitamin B-12 and vitamin D. Try starting off your day with this nutritious breakfast.

### Mixed-Up Eggs and Spinach\*

**Servings:** 8 • **Prep Time:** 15 min • **Cook Time:** N/A

#### Ingredients

- 4 large eggs
- 1 cup spinach, chopped or torn into small pieces
- 2 Tbsp. chopped green onions
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. oil

#### Directions

1. Crack the eggs into a bowl and use a fork to whisk the mixture well until the yolks and whites are blended.
2. Add the spinach, green onions, and salt to the bowl and mix well. The mixture should look very "spinach-y" and not very "egg-y".
3. Place a skillet on the stove, add the oil, and turn the heat to a medium temperature.
4. Add the egg mixture and let it cook for 1-2 minutes. Start carefully flipping portions of the eggs to cook them through.
5. When the eggs are no longer runny, remove from the heat and serve right away.
6. Enjoy!

\*Recipe provided by Patrice Carr from the Durham County Department of Public Health Nutrition Division (919-560-7837).



## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

### Breast Cancer Risk Associated With Permanent Hair Dye and Straighteners

New research published in the International Journal of Cancer raises concerns about the safety of permanent hair dye and chemical hair straighteners, especially among African American women. Researchers from the Sister Study, conducted by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), one of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), found that women who use permanent hair dye and chemical hair straighteners have a higher risk of developing breast cancer than women who do not use these products<sup>1</sup>. The research suggests that breast cancer risk increased with more frequent use of these chemical hair products.

From 2003 – 2009, more than 50,000 women across the U.S. and Puerto Rico joined the Sister Study. The enrolled women were between the ages 35–74 and at least one of their biological sisters had breast cancer. Researchers analyzed data from 46,709 women in the Sister Study. Key findings include:

- Women who regularly used permanent hair dye in the 12 months prior to enrolling in the study were 9% more likely to develop breast cancer than women who did not use hair dye.
- Among African American women, using permanent dyes every five to eight weeks or more was associated with a 60% increased risk of breast cancer as compared with an 8% increased risk for white women.
- The research team found little to no increase in breast cancer risk for semi-permanent or temporary dye use.
- Women who used hair straighteners at least every five to eight weeks were about 30% more likely to develop breast cancer.
- Straightener use was much more common among African American women even though the association between straightener use and breast cancer was similar in African American and white women.

Co-author Dale Sandler, Ph.D., chief of the NIEHS Epidemiology Branch, cautioned that the study findings should be understood in context. Although there is some prior evidence to support the association with chemical straighteners, these results need to be replicated in other studies.

When asked if women should stop dyeing or straightening their hair, Sandler said, “We are exposed to many things that could potentially contribute to breast cancer, and it is unlikely that any single factor explains a woman’s risk. While it is too early to make a firm recommendation, avoiding these chemicals might be one more thing women can do to reduce their risk of breast cancer.”

<sup>1</sup> [www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/permanent-hair-dye-straighteners-may-increase-breast-cancer-risk](http://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/permanent-hair-dye-straighteners-may-increase-breast-cancer-risk)



## THE READING NOOK

### Winter 2020 Featured Book Selection

**Title:** A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind

**Author:** Harriet A. Washington

**Summary:** Harriett Washington, award-winning science writer and bioethicist, takes a closer look at the impact of environmental racism on communities of color in the United States and how environmental racism damages the minds of impoverished African American children exposed to toxins and pathogens in marginalized communities.



The Reading Nook will feature other books in future newsletters.

[www.npr.org/2019/07/27/745925045/book-a-terrible-thing-to-waste](http://www.npr.org/2019/07/27/745925045/book-a-terrible-thing-to-waste)

[www.barnesandnoble.com/readouts/a-terrible-thing-to-waste-environmental-racism-and-its-assault-on-the-american-mind](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/readouts/a-terrible-thing-to-waste-environmental-racism-and-its-assault-on-the-american-mind)



## RECENTER, REFOCUS, RECHARGE

### The SELF-Care Solution, One Month at a Time

ABC News chief medical correspondent and board-certified OB-GYN, Jennifer Ashton, M.D., recently invited the Good Morning America viewing audience to make self-care a priority with a new self-care challenge every month throughout 2020. Completing challenges individually allows you to see how each individual change impacts your health and makes the challenge sustainable if you see a positive difference. Dr. Ashton's book, "The Self-Care Solution: A Year of Becoming Happier, Healthier, and Fitter – One Month at a Time," teaches readers how to recalibrate their life to enjoy a better, healthier year, one month at a time.

Start your "Year of SELF Care" by focusing on 12 separate challenges. Look at each challenge as a new habit will impact your overall health. Once you complete the first challenge, make a different challenge for the next month and every month after. By December 2020, you will have completed an entire year of self-care challenges that don't take time or money but will leave you with lasting habits.

Examples of some simple challenges may include limiting sugar intake for the month of April, limiting alcohol intake for the month of May, limiting screen time for the month June, or even adopting an earlier bedtime in July. All of these changes can lead to better health. Tackling a different area of wellness month by month will allow you to improve your health and motivate you to make permanent lifestyle changes.

Go beyond the spa day and the stay-cation and create self-care challenges that take only a few minutes, cost no money, and have the potential to impact your health and wellness.

[www.harpercollins.com/9780062885425/the-self-care-solution](http://www.harpercollins.com/9780062885425/the-self-care-solution)

[www.goodmorningamerica.com/wellness/story/give-care-month-time-2020-68021840](http://www.goodmorningamerica.com/wellness/story/give-care-month-time-2020-68021840)



### SHARE YOUR STORY

We would love to hear your story! Sharing a story about your personal WHA experiences can provide encouragement and support to others. Make a difference in the life of another by sharing your poetry, song lyrics, inspirational quotes, drawings, or photos. Email your story to [WHAD@niehs.nih.gov](mailto:WHAD@niehs.nih.gov) or call 984-287-4414 if you have questions. Your story may be featured in a future newsletter!

## LET'S STAY IN TOUCH!

Be on the lookout for virtual correspondence from us! During this challenging time, we would like to stay in touch with you by providing health and activity updates. Please send us your suggestions for health-related topics that interest you. Always feel free to contact us by email at [WHAD@niehs.nih.gov](mailto:WHAD@niehs.nih.gov) if you have any suggestions for health-related topics you would like for us to address. Please let us know if you have any changes to your phone number(s), mailing address, or email address.

