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Education and feedback may help improve heart health among high-risk groups

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Using a smart phone app for education and feedback about heart-healthy behavior may decrease the risk for heart and blood vessel disease among young black women, researchers said in a pilot feasibility study presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2014.

"We need to raise awareness among women and their healthcare providers of gender and racial differences in cardiovascular disease," said Jo-Ann Eastwood, Ph.D., study lead author and associate professor at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Nursing. "Women are social by nature, and having the education and the connection with someone to coach them supports behavior change over time."

Young black women are at increased risk of heart and blood vessel disease. Each year, 50,000 black women die of heart and blood vessel disease, and nearly half of black women age 20 years and older have some form of the disease.

The researchers assigned study participants to one of two groups based on church affiliation. The first group (the treatment group) attended a series of four classes about reducing risks for heart and blood vessel disease, while the second group did not. Each participant also received a smartphone with an app that measured physical activity and blood pressure, and sent automatic and individualized personal messages regarding study activities.

Researchers found differences that favored the treatment group,

including better blood pressure and cholesterol levels, greater drops in stress and anxiety and increased healthy habits.

Participants included 49 black women between 25 and 45 years old with two risk factors for heart disease.

Provided by American Heart Association