

Hypertension and its Health Disparities Among the Races

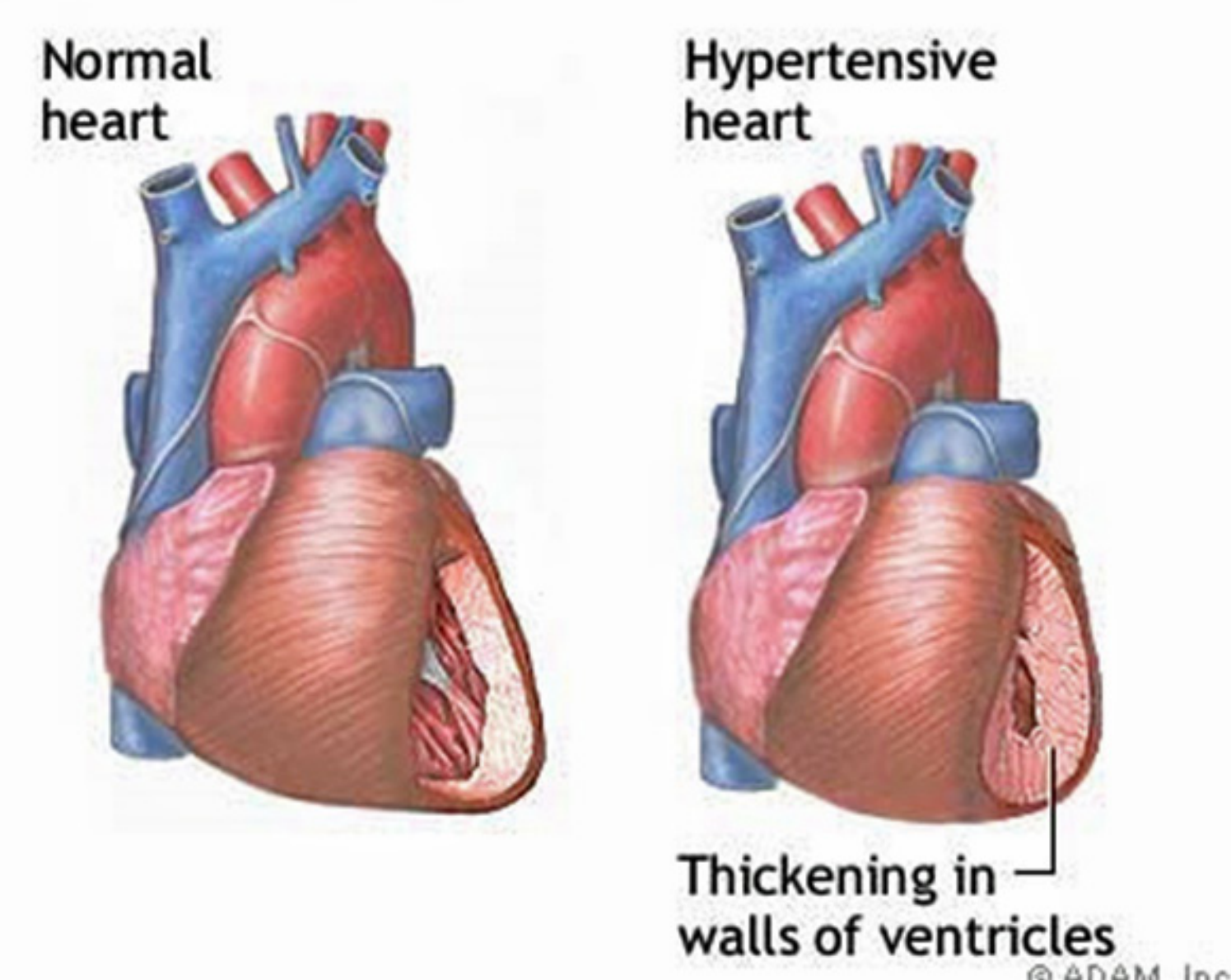
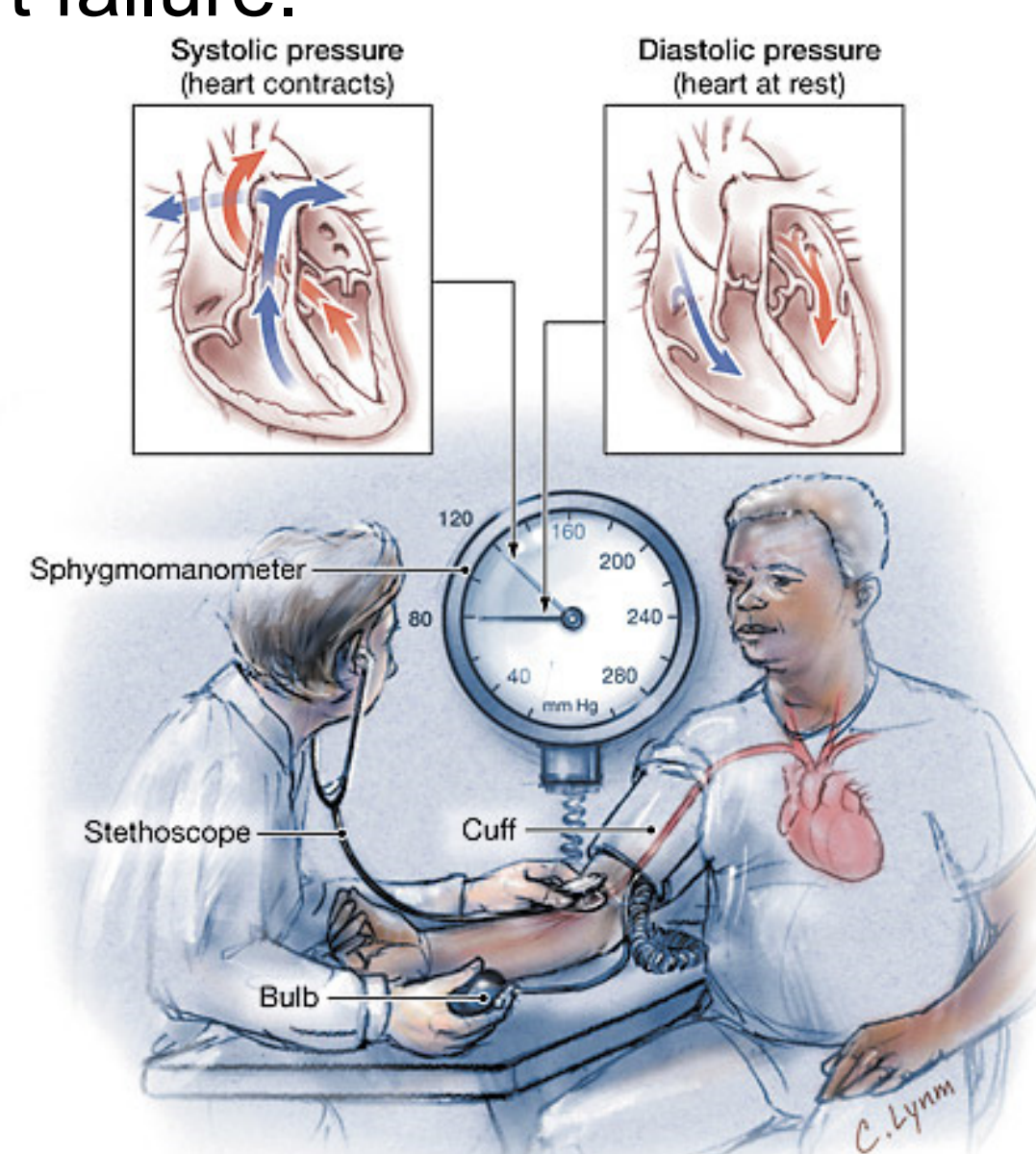
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What is hypertension?

Hypertension or high blood pressure is a disorder in which the blood pressure in the arteries is chronically elevated to a high level. The arteries are blood vessels that pump the blood to tissues and other organs in the body. The blood pressure is the force with which the blood pushes up against the walls of the arteries as it travels throughout the body. If the pressure is too high, then the heart has to work harder to pump the blood. This can result in damages to vital organs, and may lead to several diseases including heart attack, stroke and heart failure.

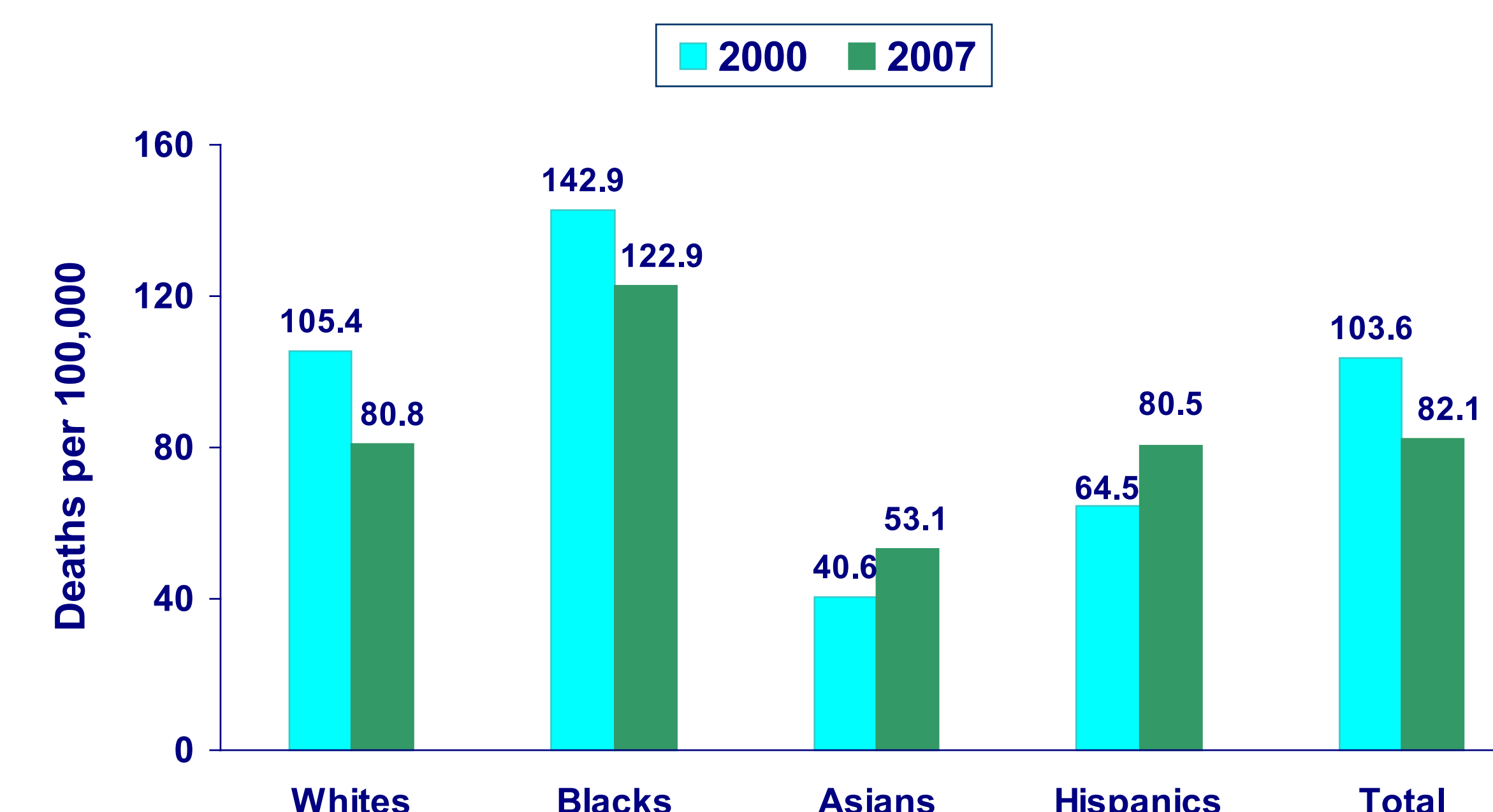
People that are diagnosed with hypertension usually have a blood pressure reading that is higher than 120/80 mm Hg. The upper number (120) refers to the systolic pressure, which is the peak force of the blood as it is pumped through the artery. The lower number (80) is the diastolic pressure, which is the pressure when the heart is in its relaxing stage after pumping the blood.



Hypertension health disparities

Health disparity is defined as the "differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of disease that exist among specific population groups." There are huge health disparities among the different races when concerning hypertension. Many influencing factors contribute to this disparity, mainly socioeconomic status and access to health care. Other influencing factors include living conditions and the person's ethnicity.

Mortality Rates for Causes Amenable to Health Care by Race/Ethnicity Massachusetts: 2000 and 2007



Techniques for Reducing the Disparity

- Increase access to health care and treatment
- Decrease the socioeconomic barriers
- Expand medical service to all ethnical and racial groups
- Have greater minority representation in the healthcare workforce
- Eliminate racial bias by physicians and replace with equal care for all
- Have effective evaluation of disparities-reducing programs
- Educational campaign to alert the public about awareness

Prevention of hypertension

Hypertension is a medical condition that can be preventable if the right course of action is taken. To ensure that one does not develop this condition, people should try to treat it in its earliest stage. Increasing public awareness and frequency of screenings for this condition can greatly reduce the chance of developing it. Other prevention techniques include adjusting one's lifestyle. Proper exercise and diet are the key components to maintaining a healthy weight. Reducing the pressure of stress also helps to reduce the likelihood of this condition. Since the intake of salt, tobacco, and alcohol increases the blood pressure, reducing their consumptions will help to prevent developing hypertension.

References

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Types of hypertension

Essential hypertension:

- responsible for 90-95% of all diagnosed cases
- has no single definable cause

Secondary hypertension:

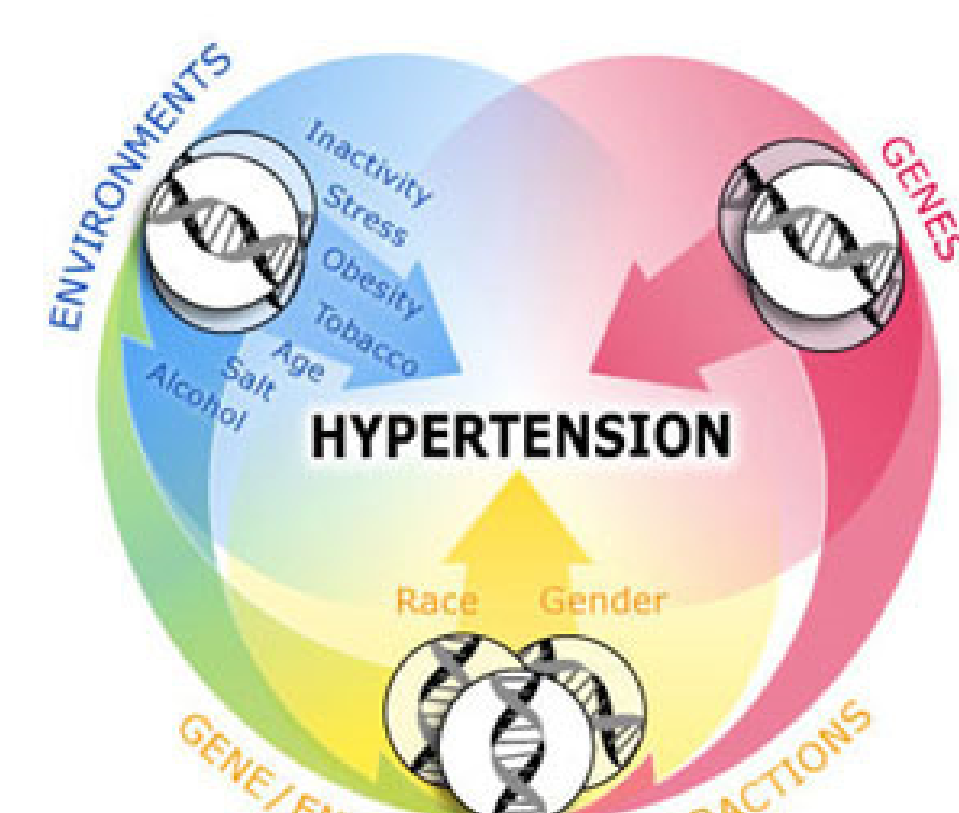
- caused by some pre-existing medical condition such as kidney disease or heart failure

Pregnancy-induced hypertension:

- appear after the 20th week of pregnancy
- more likely to occur in women who are overweight or obese

What causes hypertension?

- Aging
- Obesity or being overweight
- Smoking
- Alcohol consumption
- Lack of physical activity
- High level of salt intake
- Stress
- Having high cholesterol
- Family history of disorder
- Pre-existing medical condition

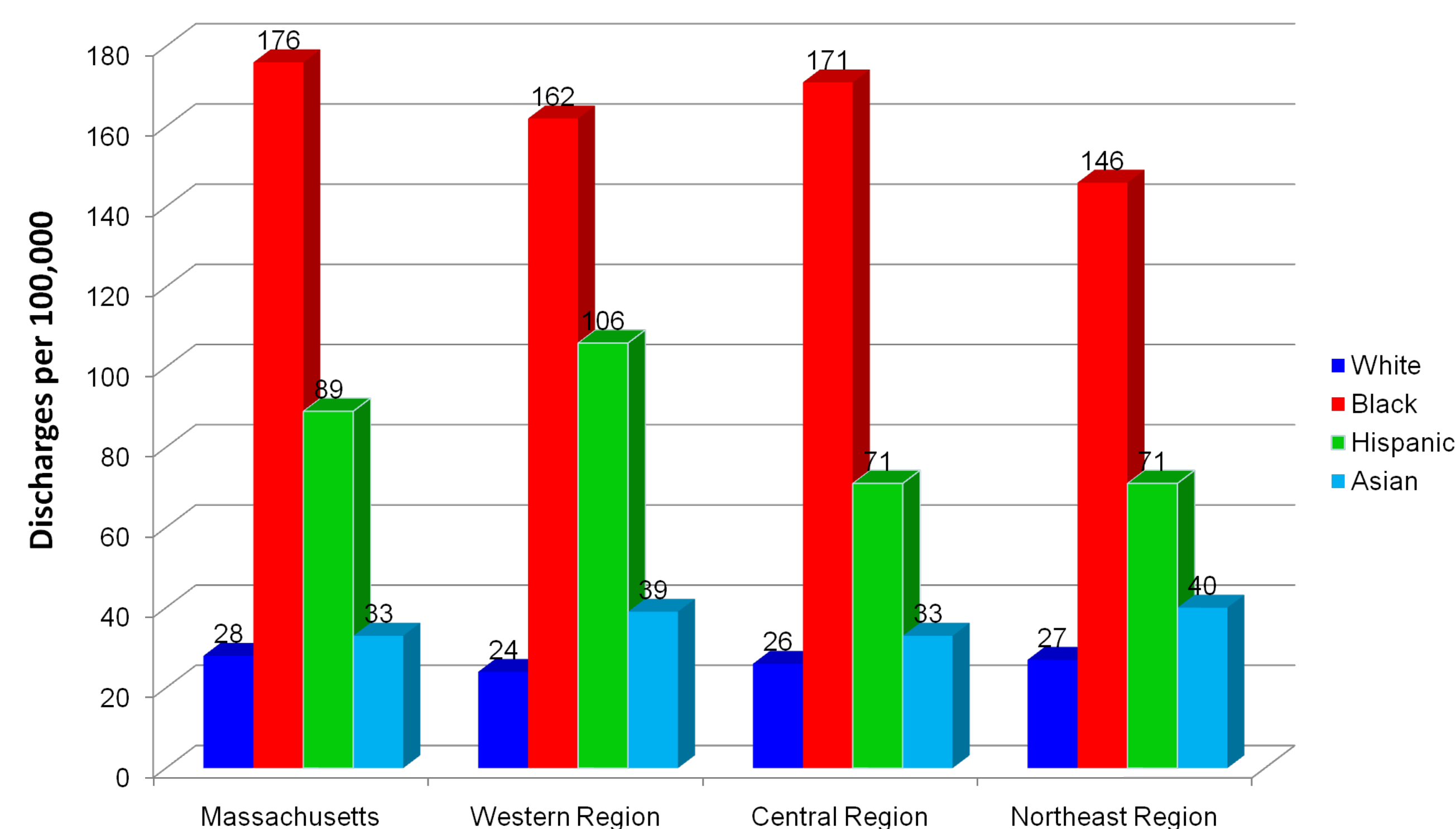


Treatments



- lose weight
- reduce the use of tobacco products
- limit alcohol intake
- reduce sodium intake
- exercise regularly
- eat healthy food
- control stress levels
- anti-hypertensive medications

Hypertension Hospital Discharge Rate by Race/Ethnicity in Massachusetts: 2003-2005



Who is affected by the disparity?

Studies have shown that blacks have a higher prevalence and earlier onset of hypertension than any other race or ethnicity. They have the highest rate of incidences, while whites have the lowest rate of incidences of hypertension in Massachusetts. This disparity is partly attributed to the differences in socioeconomic status and access to health care. Many blacks tend to live in underprivileged area, in which access to healthcare is limited. They usually receive poorer care compared to their white counterparts. Most blacks receive care from public clinics, while whites receive care from private clinics. Also, their lack of initiative to seek further care may affect the rate at which they develop hypertension. Their lack of satisfaction with their previous health care provider can result in a lack of trust in the health care system.