

**Men's Health Essay II**

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Imagine a car running on empty. Warning lights flash as soon as the car starts, engine sputtering, barely making it to the next stop. Just like that car, a person not living a healthy lifestyle often feels like running on empty, pushing through long days fueled by caffeine, skipping meals, battling stress without release, and collapsing into bed with a restless mind. It's easy for one to fall into this trap. I, myself, have been guilty of gravitating towards this lifestyle, especially when life gets overwhelming; responsibilities seem to pile up just like the dishes, and fast food feels faster than cooking. A car engine may keep going for a while, but without proper care, it will eventually break down. In the same way, when we neglect our health, our bodies give us signals, such as headaches, low energy, anxiety, all pleading for a tune-up. Just as a car needs regular maintenance to run smoothly, our bodies need consistent care to live and thrive fully. Three current strategies to help maintain a healthy lifestyle include reducing the amount of time spent sitting, limiting screen usage, and expressing gratitude more often instead of frequently complaining.

When you sit, you use less energy than you do if you were standing or moving. While that seems pretty obvious, the health concerns that come with sitting down for extended periods of time aren't quite as obvious. According to Laskowski (2022), research suggests that people who sat for more than 8 hours a day, with no physical activity, had a risk of dying similar to the risk posed by obesity and smoking. And other studies done by Yale Medicine have shown a linkage to a shorter lifespan when spending hours in a chair. Moving forward, if that doesn't make you want to get up and start moving around, putting your phone down definitely will as excessive screen time can contribute to potential hazards to physical, mental, and overall health. By our bodies adapting this poor posture due to using these cellular devices, in return, we experience constant neck and shoulder pain, eye strain, headaches, and even blurred vision. On

top of that, excessive screen time can “limit opportunities for face-to-face interaction, which can lead to social isolation and loneliness” (Devi 2023). Screen time can also interfere with cognitive development, consequently reducing attention span and limiting problem solving abilities. But don’t even think about complaining that you have to get up and put the phone away, as complaining has a direct impact on your physical and emotional health. Complaining can impact your health by triggering the release of cortisol, a stress hormone, and that stress hormone will ultimately rewire your brain for negativity. According to Bradberry (2022), excess cortisol from frequent complaining weakens your immune system, raising the risk of various illnesses. Furthermore, by getting up off your chair, stop scrolling through social media and complaining about how much stuff you have to do, one can easily maintain a better and healthier lifestyle.

Now that my car has the right fuel to keep it going, what happens to my car at the intersection of mental health and being black, and why does it suddenly seem to come to a halt? African Americans face a range of psychological challenges that are deeply rooted in historic, social, and systemic factors. One of the stop signs found at that intersection reads as “stigma”, and that particular stop sign always seems to build up traffic, but why? For many people in the Black community, it can be very difficult to raise concern about the topic of mental health due to the thought of how they will be perceived. This fear prevents people from seeking the proper help when they truly need it. Additionally, the Black community tends to turn a blind eye to mental health, and instead they rely solely on faith to get them back on their feet. While faith communities can provide support and reduce isolation, explained by the National Alliance on Mental Health, “that should not be the only option for people whose daily functioning is impaired by mental health symptoms.” Furthermore, “[African Americans] are more likely to

experience socioeconomic disparities such as exclusion from health, educational, social, and economic resources, [which] may contribute to worse mental health outcomes.”

Lastly, the social determinants of risk, detection, and treatment for cardiovascular disease are the everyday factors in people’s lives that influence their heart health and access to care. Things like income, education, employment, and access to nutritious food or safe places to exercise all play a role in shaping one’s risk of developing cardiovascular disease. People living in low income neighborhoods may experience more stress, limited access to healthy foods, or fewer opportunities for physical health, which, all above, can raise their risk. When it comes to detection, individuals without regular access to healthcare, health insurance, or transportation may not get screened or diagnosed early. In similarity, treatment can also be impacted as one may be deciphering between paying rent or continuing a treatment plan. Overall, where someone lives, works, and grows up can significantly shape their heart health outcomes.

To tie things up, just like a car needs regular maintenance, our health requires consistent care, attention, and access to the right resources. If you ignore a warning light on your dashboard, the problem only gets worse over time. The same goes for our bodies. Without early detection, preventative care, and proper treatment, small issues can turn into life-threatening conditions like cardiovascular disease. The difference is, you can replace a car; however, you only get one body. So take care of it like your life depends on it- because it does.

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