

# Promoting Physical Activity Among Overweight Young African American Women Using the Internet

[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Bret Atkins] The Internet is used for many reasons. You can look up directions, do research for a school project, or find a recipe. But can it be a helpful tool to promote physical activity?

I'm Bret Atkins for CDC's journal *Preventing Chronic Disease*. Today I'm talking with Dr. Nefertiti Durant about Internet tools that may help promote physical activity among overweight young African American women. Dr. Durant is an Associate Professor in the Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Her study was featured in a January 2014 release of *Preventing Chronic Disease*. Thank you for joining us, Dr. Durant.

[Nefertiti Durant] Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Bret Atkins] Dr. Durant, briefly tell listeners about your study.

[Nefertiti Durant] Bret, our study is a study to look at how you can use the Internet, potentially, to promote physical activity in overweight and obese young adult African American young women. We wanted to look at whether it's possible to use the Internet to create a program that would promote physical activity in college-aged overweight and obese young adult African American young women. You know, unfortunately, this is the population that's most at risk but that often, as researchers, we tend to forget about.

[Bret Atkins] Did you find that there are a lot of effective online tools available specifically for African American women looking for motivation to begin exercising?

[Nefertiti Durant] I wish that I could say that I did, but when we started our search, we really didn't find any tools at all. So that's what motivated me to get started. We felt that there was definitely a need to create a tool and to create a tool that was culturally relevant. There had been a lot of work done commercially and in the research field to use Internet tools to promote physical activity, but honestly we could not find tools that were specific for African American young women. And certainly in the tools that we were finding, we couldn't find tools that seemed to address the needs of African American young women.

[Bret Atkins] As part of the study, your team interviewed groups of young overweight African American women. Describe what participants were asked to do.

[Nefertiti Durant] There're lots of websites out there that promote physical activity on the Internet. There are websites that are government sponsored; there are websites that are sponsored by entities such as the American Heart Association. We chose to go with a very popular website at the time, [sparkpeople.com](http://sparkpeople.com), and we chose it based on its popularity among laypeople. And we had young women to actually go on the website in real time and look at the portions of the website that are used to promote physical activity. And we asked them, what parts of the website

appeal to you as an African American woman, and what parts to do you think are...do we absolutely need to include if we're going to promote physical activity in young adult African American women?

[Bret Atkins] What did women say they would look for in an online exercise promotion tool?

[Nefertiti Durant] What they said was very interesting. Some of the things that they said they would look for were really the same as you would imagine anyone would say. So, they said they'd like tracking tools; they wanted physical activity tracking tools, tools that they would use to enter data about their walking patterns, or whatever physical activity they were doing during the day. They also said that they wanted dietary tracking tools. What was interesting in terms of the cultural relevancy was that they wanted tools that would, they wanted to have a diversity of body images. And so they clearly identified that they wanted to see women of diverse shapes and sizes depicted on the website itself and also depicted in exercise demonstration videos. They also indicated that they wanted to have a feature that would talk about hair care, and so it was very important to them that there were resources—some sort of feature that would talk about tips on how do you maintain African American hair during moderate intensity physical activity. The other important feature that emerged was social media or social networking, and so social support was one of the big findings in this study. Women really expressed a need to form new social networks. They wanted to meet other people online who would be supportive of them in their efforts to become physically active. And so they asked for the addition of blogs, of message boards. They really wanted a Facebook feel, if you will, Facebook, Twitter, those sorts of features incorporated into the website.

[Bret Atkins] Were there certain things that would keep them from using an online tool?

[Nefertiti Durant] You know, these young adults, they didn't identify anything that would keep them from using an online tool. Now, there's some bias inherent in this study because these are undergraduates. These are women who were enrolled at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and they were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate classes, so they all had access to computers, clearly at the university, and they all had, we checked in this population, cell phones. And so they identified no barriers. We clearly, in this study, we identified that, you know, the findings just may not be generalizable to other populations of African American women, or women who may not have access to the Internet. However, more and more I think we may find that these tools may be useful to all women because of the advent of smart phones and people using their smart phones to search the Internet.

[Bret Atkins] Why is it important to have online tools tailored specifically for young African American women?

[Nefertiti Durant] Well, it's important to include culturally relevant tools that are tailored specifically for young adult African American women because it's really important for these young women to see people who look like them. Women, the women talked over and over again about how important it was to see a diversity of women of different shapes and sizes. And so women talked at length about how they wanted to see young women who had larger body types, and how that really made a difference in terms of inspiring them that they could be physically

active over a sustained period of time. And we found that that was really one of the most striking findings. They also talked about stories, and so they talked about the inclusion of stories from other young adult African American women who had been both successful with the process of incorporating physical activity into their lifestyle, and also young women who had not been successful. And so they talked about including video stories. They said that they could learn from one another, essentially. And so we felt that both of these things were indicators that it's really important to include these culturally-tailored tools, because African American women essentially need to see themselves depicted on the screen and hear from one another, if we are going to have sustainable, effective programs.

[Bret Atkins] What do you hope will happen as a result of this research?

[Nefertiti Durant] Well, Brett, we're very excited because we've already made progress. We've been funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association to actually develop the website, and to learn more about that, you can actually log on to the website, and I can give you that link now. It is [www.loveyourheartaha.com](http://www.loveyourheartaha.com), and that's one word, [loveyourheartaha.com](http://www.loveyourheartaha.com).

[Bret Atkins] Thank you for joining us, Dr. Durant. You can read her study online at [cdc.gov/pcd](http://cdc.gov/pcd).

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.*