


Health Habits in Black Adolescents: Ethnicity Matters



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Introduction

- Habits developed in youth tend to be sustained through adulthood. Therefore, an examination of the health habits of adolescents may provide insight into future health problems.
- Studies have shown that African Americans are at high risk for cardiovascular disease (CVD) and often have poor health habits.



Introduction (cont'd.)

- African Americans also have a greater prevalence of CVD risk factors, such as hypertension, obesity, and high stress levels.
- Other Black ethnic groups (e.g., Hispanic Blacks and Caribbean Blacks) have not been studied as extensively in the US.
- Given the impact of culture on behavior, it is unclear whether the findings in African Americans generalize to other Black ethnic groups.



Purpose

- This study examined adolescents from three Black ethnic groups to determine if they differed in blood pressure, body mass index (BMI), stress levels, and health habits.



Methods

■ Participants

- Tenth grade public school students (N = 3,735)
- 48.3% boys
- 51.7% girls
- Mean age: 15.6 years
- Self-reported ethnicity
 - 51.3% African American
 - 25.1% Caribbean Black
 - 23.6% Hispanic Black



Methods (cont'd.)

- Procedures
- High school screening in Miami-Dade County, FL.
 - Height and weight obtained to determine BMI (kg/m^2)
 - Blood pressure based on the average of 2 mercury manometer readings
 - Stress Ratings and Health Habits assessed via questionnaire

Results

- No ethnic group differences in blood pressure and BMI (p s > .05).

	Hispanic Black	African American	Caribbean Black
SBP	119.4 (11.9)	119.3 (12.1)	118.6 (12.5)
DBP	69.5 (10.0)	70.2 (9.6)	70.5 (9.5)
BMI	23.7 (5.2)	23.9 (5.0)	23.6 (5.0)



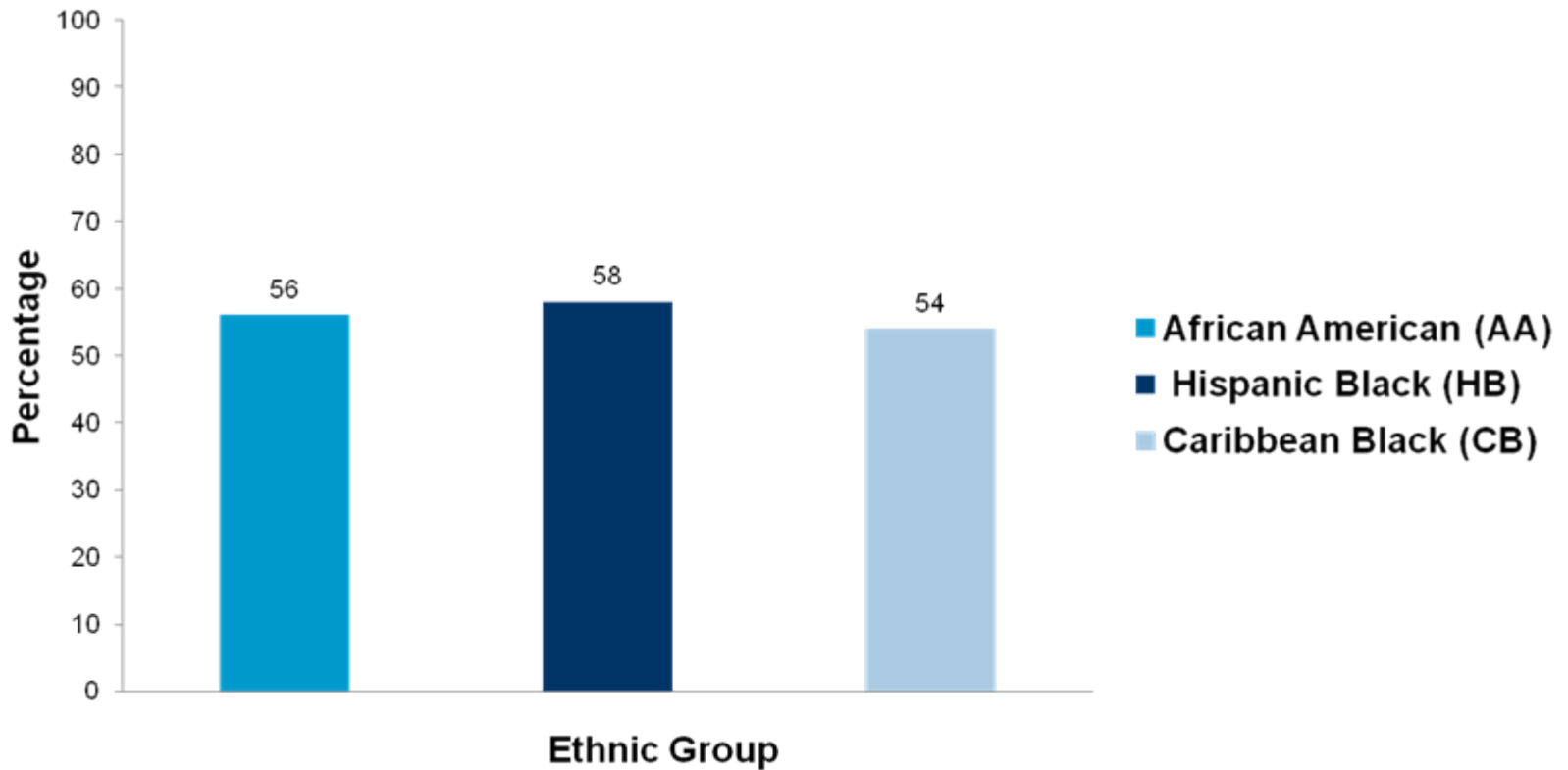
Exercise Question

On how many of the past 7 days did you exercise or participate in sports activities for at least 20 minutes that made you SWEAT and BREATHE HARD, such as basketball, jogging, fast dancing, swimming laps, tennis, fast bicycling, or similar aerobic activities?

Vigorous Exercise \geq 20 min 3+ days/wk

Results (cont'd.)

Vigorous Exercise \geq 20 min 3+ days/wk



AA = HB = CB ($p > .05$)



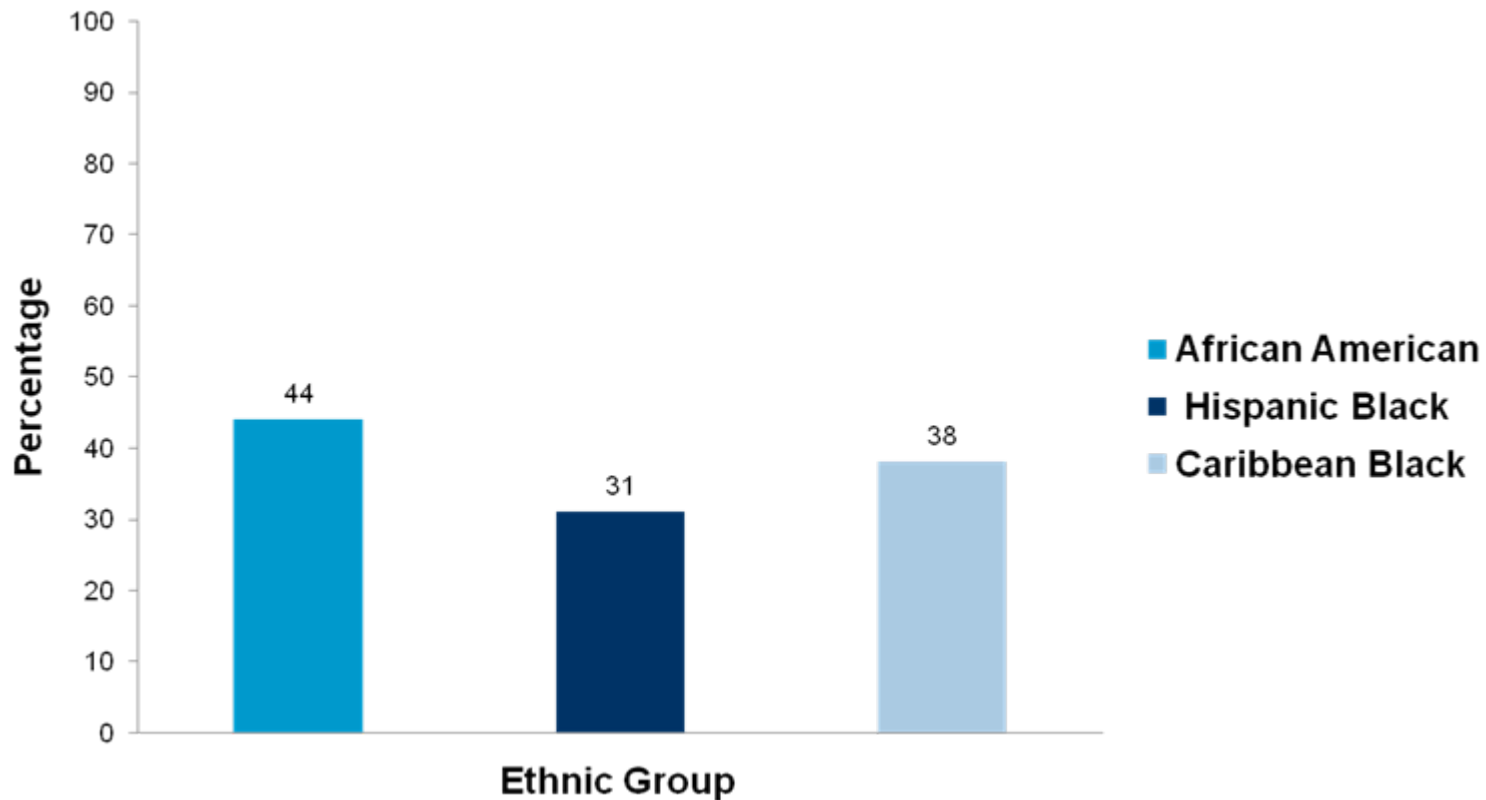
Sedentary Activity Question

On a typical weekday, how many hours do you spend watching TV, playing video games, or using a computer?

sedentary activity \geq 4 hrs/day

Results (cont'd.)

Sedentary Activity \geq 4 hours/day



AA > CB > HB (p < .0001)

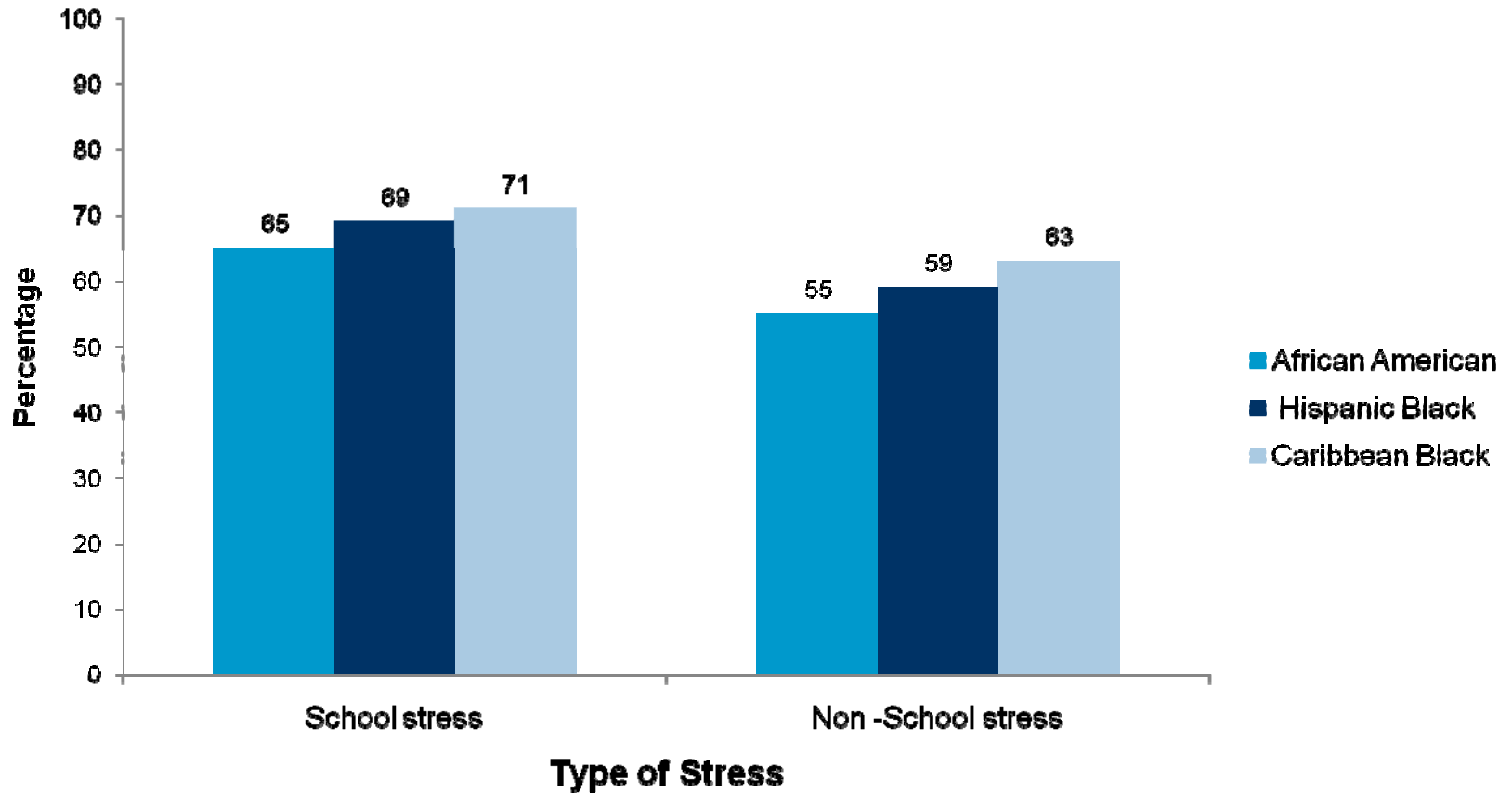
Stress Questions

In the past week,	Not	Some	Very
how stressful was school ?			
how stressful was your life outside school ?			

Stress = “Some” or “Very”

Results (cont'd.)

School and Non-School Stress



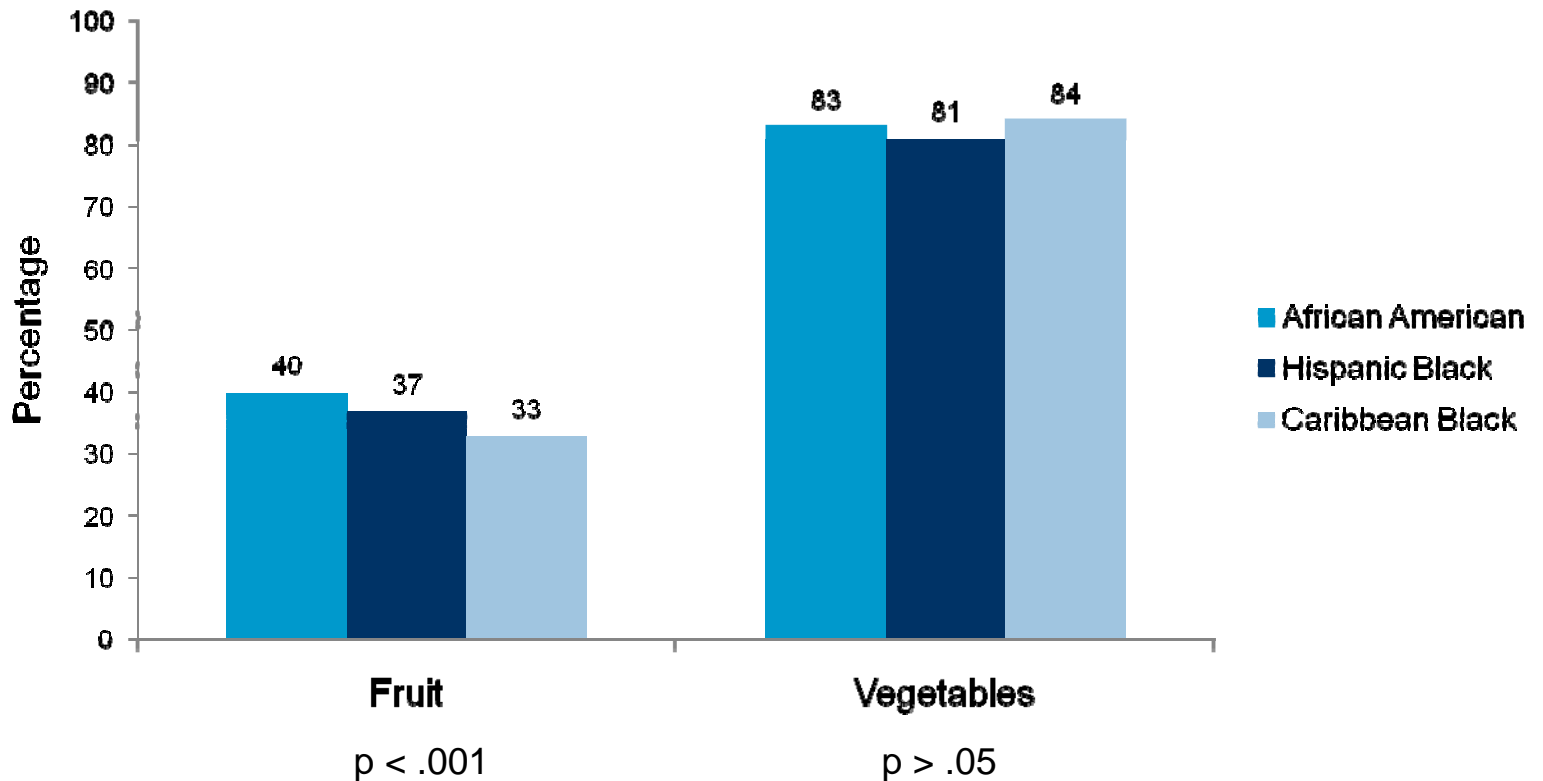
School and Non-school Stress: CB > AA
($p < .01$ and $p < .001$, respectively)

Nutrition Questions

On a typical day do you:	No	Once	Twice or more
eat FRUIT or drink FRUIT JUICE?			
eat TOSSED SALAD and/or VEGETABLES?			
eat SALTY FOODS or add SALT to your food?			
eat fatty meats (ex. HAMBURGERS, HOT DOGS, or RED MEAT)?			
eat FRENCH FRIES or HIGH FAT CHIPS (e.g. Potato chips, corn chips, cheese puffs)?			
eat COOKIES, DOUGHNUTS, PIE, CAKE, or other SWEETS or CANDIES?			
drink REGULAR (non-diet) SODA?			

Results (cont'd.)

Fruit and Vegetable Consumption (at least once/day)

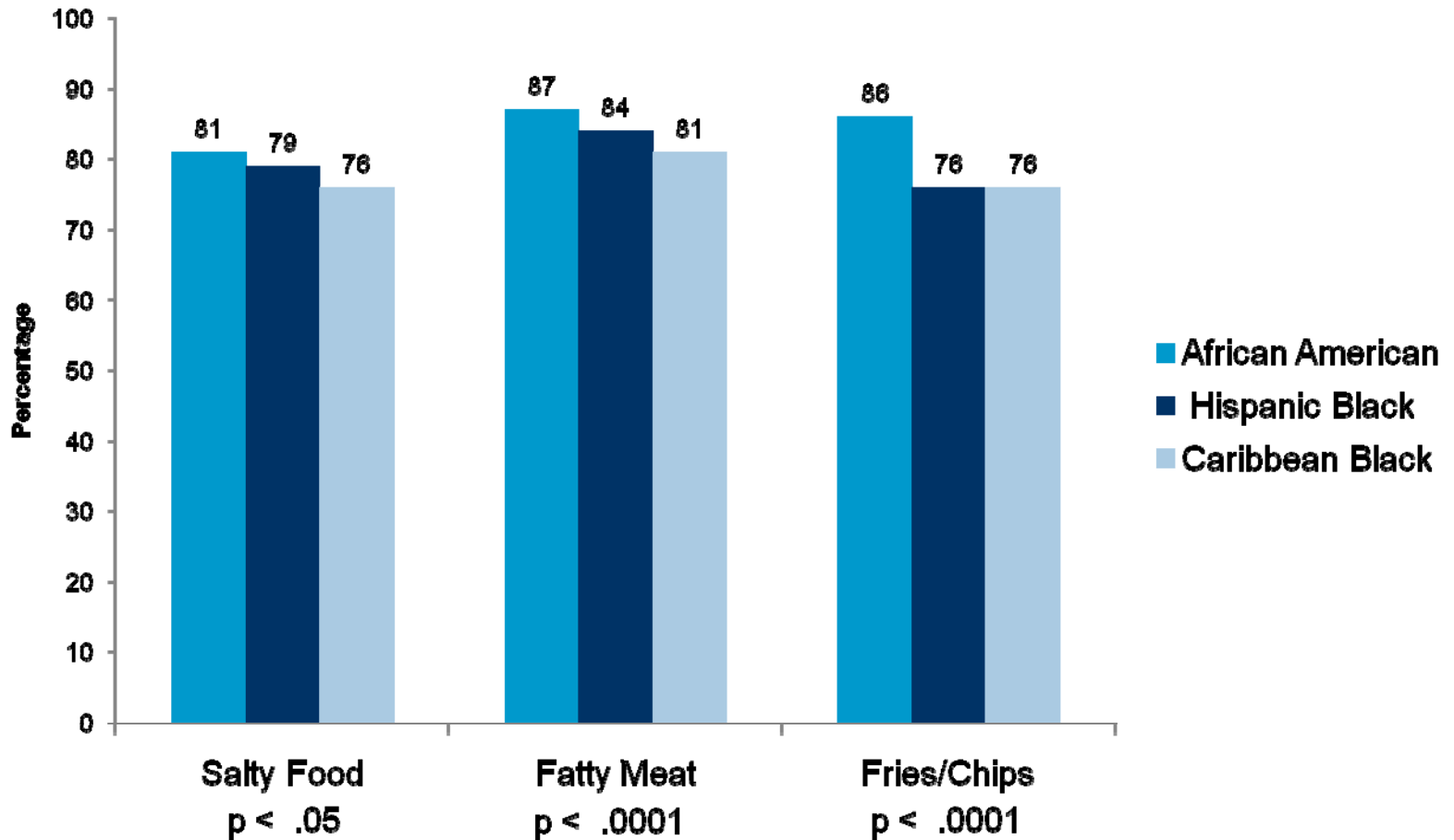


Fruit: AA = HB > CB

Vegetables: AA = HB = CB (p > .05)

Results (cont'd.)

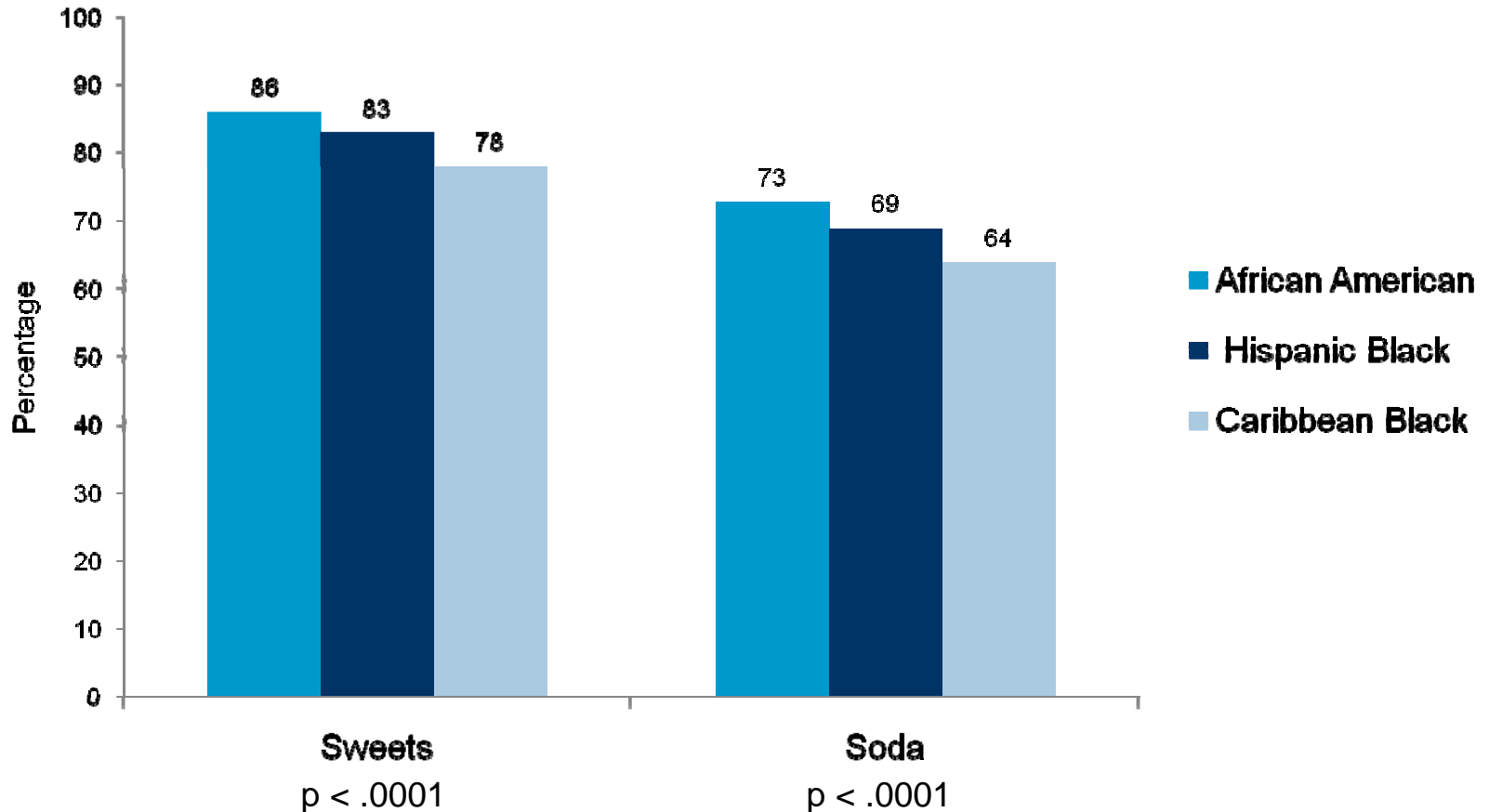
Consumption of Salty and Fatty Foods (at least once/day)



Salty Foods: AA > CB ; Fatty Meat: AA>HB>CB; Fries/chips: AA > HB = CB

Results (cont'd.)

Consumption of Sweets and Soda (at least once/day)



Sweets & Soda: AA > HB > CB



Conclusions

- In general, Black youth of all ethnicities report poor health habits. Only about half report engaging in at least a minimal level of aerobic exercise.
- Within Black youth, ethnicity appears to be associated with differences in the prevalence of health habits.
- With few exceptions, African Americans reported having the most negative health habit profile.



Conclusions (cont'd.)

- While Caribbean Blacks reported the best nutrition habits with the exception of low daily fruit consumption, the basis for these positive findings is unclear.
- Caribbean Blacks also reported the highest levels of stress. Adjusting to life in the US may be more difficult for Caribbean Blacks (e.g., differences in the education system and parental expectations for success).



Conclusions (cont'd.)

- These findings may be attributable to the impact of culture or other social factors on health behaviors.
- With regard to nutrition, issues of availability and access may play a role in these results, especially for fruits and fatty foods.
- Addressing ethnic differences within racial groups may be the key to creating effective, targeted interventions to improve health habits in adolescents.



Future Directions

- Because ethnic group classification is based on self-report, work is needed to determine if the classification has the same meaning for everyone who made that selection.
- An examination of the impact of assimilation on health habits, stress and other CV risk factors among Black ethnic adolescent groups is warranted.



Future Directions (cont'd.)

- Development of a culturally sensitive group intervention for Black youth that aims to improve nutrition and physical activity and reduce stress and sedentary activity is needed.