



**CASONY**  
Caribbean American  
Society of New York



**DECEMBER  
2025**



# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT



## AWARENESS & ACTION

### FROM THE DESK OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

by Dr. D. L. Beckles

**December** - As we approach the holiday season — a time of family, faith, and feasting — I want to offer a gentle reminder: the best gift you can give your loved ones is their peace of mind that you are healthy.

For many Caribbean-New York families, the weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's are a mix of joy and pressure. We rush to prepare meals, host gatherings, send money

home, and make everything perfect for everyone else. But in the process, we forget to breathe — and our bodies keep score.

Every year, hospital admissions for stroke and heart attack rise during the holidays. The causes are simple but profound: stress, salt, and sleep deprivation. It's called the "holiday heart syndrome," and it's claiming too many of our mothers, fathers, and neighbors.

This December, our theme — Stress, Stroke & Salt — calls us to slow down and guard our well-being as fiercely as we guard our traditions. Your heart and mind deserve rest, not rush.

### BY THE NUMBERS

**122 Million  
Americans  
have High  
Blood  
pressure**  
**47% of the  
USA  
Population  
have High  
Blood  
Pressure**







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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT



## A Message of Mindful Celebration

**This holiday season, I invite you to celebrate differently:**

- **You can take your time sitting and eating slowly. Let gratitude enhance your meal more than salt does.**
- **Instead of competing, focus on connecting. Remember, not everything needs to be perfect—just present.**
- **Laugh often, sleep deeply, and feel free to say no without guilt.**

**Prioritizing your health is not selfish; it's sacred. It is one of the most meaningful gifts you can give in this life.**

**As your Chief Medical Officer, I wish you and your families a season filled with stillness, strength, and stewardship over both your physical and spiritual hearts. Let's walk into the holidays calmly and embrace the new year fully.**

**With peace and purpose,**

**Dr. Daniel L. Beckles, MD, PhD  
Chief Medical Officer-TPAUSA**

**Horace Davis  
Founder-Board President CASONY**





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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT

## Bridging Health Equity Between the Caribbean and New York

### The ABCs of Peace & Prevention

When I speak about holiday health, I always return to the ABCS — the foundation of self-care that protects both mind and body:

#### A is for A1C — Awareness.

Your blood sugar reflects how your body handles stress and food. The holidays are not a time to ignore it; they're a chance to balance it. Check your A1C before and after the season to keep your energy and mood steady.

#### B is for Blood Pressure — Breathe.

Take deep breaths throughout the day and let your pressure settle. Salt, anger, and anxiety all raise your numbers — sometimes more than food does. Aim to stay below 120/80 and check your pressure before you check your phone.

#### C is for Cholesterol — Choose Wisely.

Holiday plates don't have to hurt you. Choose more vegetables than meat, bake instead of fry, and drink water between bites. Small choices today protect tomorrow's heart.

#### S is for Screenings — Stay Ahead.

Before the year ends, schedule your blood tests, mammogram, colon screening.

Screenings save lives — and give you peace of mind that no gift can replace.

**“Your peace is your pressure control. Your breath is your medicine. Your numbers are your navigation.”**





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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT



## Blood Pressure Categories



American  
Heart  
Association.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (top/upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (bottom/lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120-129	and	LESS THAN 80
STAGE 1 HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)	130-139	or	80-89
STAGE 2 HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
SEVERE HYPERTENSION (If you don't have symptoms*, call your health care professional.)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120
HYPERTENSIVE EMERGENCY (If you have any of these symptoms*, call 911.)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

\*symptoms: chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness, weakness, change in vision or difficulty speaking

[heart.org/bplevels](https://heart.org/bplevels)

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**How to measure Blood  
Pressure?**



**Take Action Today**





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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT

## Understanding Stress, Stroke & Salt: The Holiday Health Triangle

How Three *Silent* Forces Collide Every Holiday Season

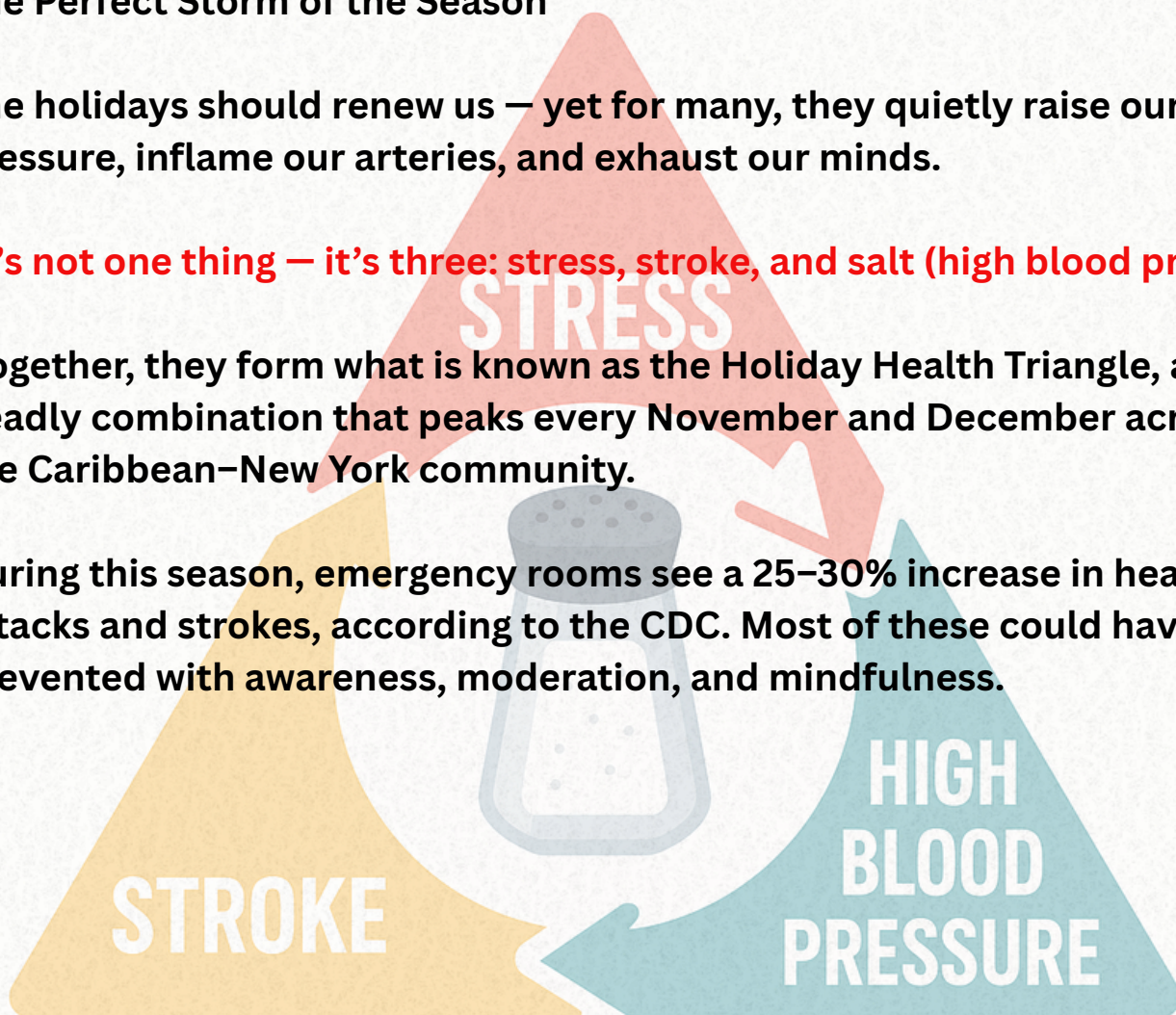
### The Perfect Storm of the Season

The holidays should renew us — yet for many, they quietly raise our blood pressure, inflame our arteries, and exhaust our minds.

**It's not one thing — it's three: stress, stroke, and salt (high blood pressure).**

Together, they form what is known as the Holiday Health Triangle, a deadly combination that peaks every November and December across the Caribbean–New York community.

During this season, emergency rooms see a 25–30% increase in heart attacks and strokes, according to the CDC. Most of these could have been prevented with awareness, moderation, and mindfulness.



**“The holidays don’t have to break your heart — they can strengthen it.”**





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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT



## Understanding Stress, Stroke & Salt: The Holiday Health Triangle How Three *Silent* Forces Collide Every Holiday Season

### Stress — The Hidden Trigger

In our culture, stress is often worn as a badge of honor.

We say, “I’m fine, just tired,” or “I’ll rest after the holidays.” But the truth is, chronic stress can be more dangerous than a bad diet. It keeps the body flooded with cortisol and adrenaline, raising blood pressure and blood sugar, straining the heart, and clouding our judgment.

Stress amplifies salt’s effects — even moderate sodium becomes harmful when paired with constant tension.

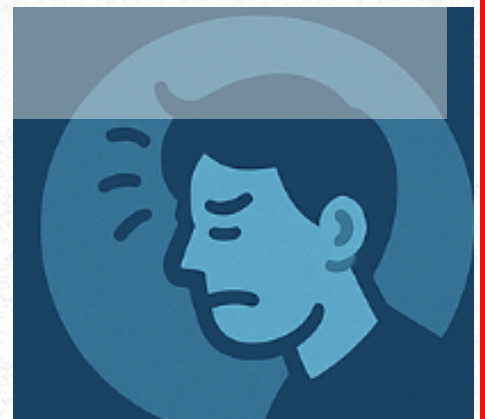
Common holiday stressors include:

- Financial pressure and gift-giving obligations.
- Overworking to “make the season special.”
- Family conflict or loneliness.
- Sleep loss and travel fatigue.
- “Comparison pressure” from social media.

**STRESS**

**STROKE**

**HIGH  
BLOOD  
PRESSURE**



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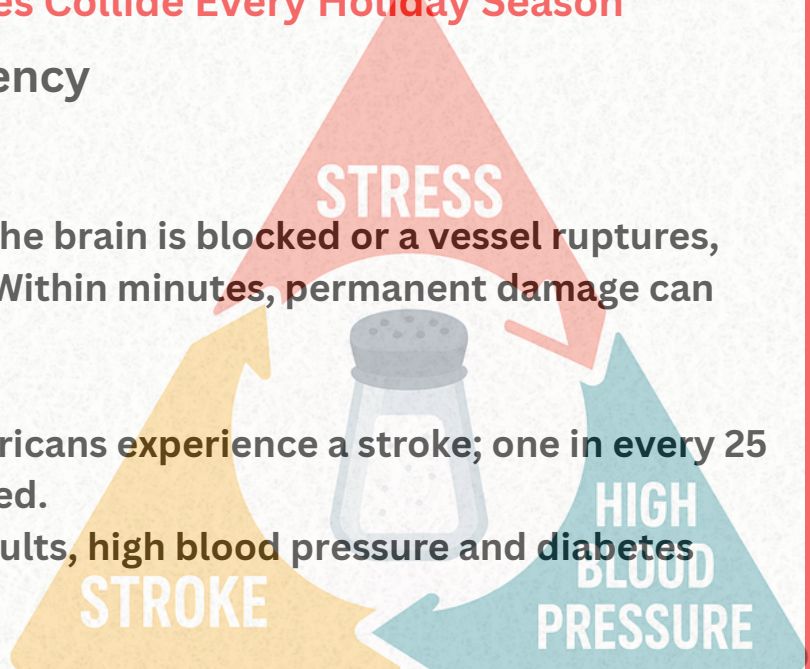
### Stroke – The Silent Emergency

Stroke doesn't warn – it strikes.

It happens when blood flow to the brain is blocked or a vessel ruptures, depriving brain cells of oxygen. Within minutes, permanent damage can occur.

Every year, nearly 800,000 Americans experience a stroke; one in every 25 deaths in the U.S. is stroke-related.

Among Caribbean-American adults, high blood pressure and diabetes increase the risk even higher.



During the holidays, a delayed medical response makes matters worse.

People ignore early symptoms – thinking it's fatigue, stress, or indigestion – and wait “until after the party” to call 911. By then, it's often too late.

### Remember the F.A.S.T. Rule:

Letter	Meaning	What to Look For
F	Face drooping	One side of the face feels numb or uneven.
A	Arm weakness	One arm drifts down when raised.
S	Speech difficulty	Slurred or strange speech.
T	Time to call 911	Don't wait. Every second counts.

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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT

## Understanding Stress, Stroke & Salt: The Holiday Health Triangle

How Three *Silent* Forces Collide Every Holiday Season

### Salt — The Flavor That Fights Your Heart

Salt is essential — but in excess, it's a silent poison.

Most Caribbean-American adults consume twice the recommended daily limit of sodium (2,300 mg/day) — and the holidays only make it worse.

From cured meats and soups to seasoning cubes and salted butter, sodium sneaks into nearly every dish. Too much salt stiffens blood vessels, increases pressure, and overloads the kidneys.

When combined with stress and alcohol, it becomes a perfect storm for heart and brain emergencies.



#### Holiday Salt Traps:

- Seasoning cubes and meat rubs.
- Pickled and smoked meats.
- Canned peas, beans, and soups.
- Store-bought sauces and gravies.
- Restaurant catering foods — often 3× daily sodium allowance in one meal.



Tip: Taste before salting — and remember that “salt-free” doesn’t mean “flavor-free.” Herbs like thyme, garlic, pimento, turmeric, and scallion build taste and lower risk.

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## Health by the Numbers: The Hidden Holiday Health Crisis



### The Global Picture

The holidays are joyful — but data shows they're also one of the most dangerous times of the year for the heart and brain.

The combination of cold weather, heavy food, emotional strain, and skipped medications makes November through January the season when cardiovascular emergencies silently spike worldwide.

- ❤️ 17.9 million people die each year from cardiovascular diseases — that's one in three deaths globally. (World Health Organization, 2025)
- 🧠 Stroke accounts for 11% of all deaths globally, and is the #1 cause of long-term disability. (WHO, 2025)
- 💧 80% of these deaths are preventable with lifestyle and blood pressure control.
- 🍴 Global sodium intake is nearly double the recommended limit, with most coming from packaged and restaurant foods. (WHO, 2024)
- 💬 Chronic **stress contributes to a 50% higher risk of heart disease** and stroke — even in non-smokers. (Harvard Health, 2025)

**“The holidays are not a free pass from self-care — they're the reason for it.”**





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## Health by the Numbers: The Hidden Holiday Health Crisis



### The U.S. Reality – The “Holiday Heart Syndrome”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2025):

- 🌟 1 in 5 deaths in the U.S. is caused by heart disease.
- ⚡ Heart attacks increase 25% in December and January – especially in the week after Thanksgiving and on Christmas Day.
- 🥤 The average American consumes 4,500 calories and 230% of their sodium limit during a single holiday meal.
- 🛌 40% of adults report sleeping less and exercising less during the holidays.
- 💊 Up to 20% of patients skip or forget medications during travel or gatherings.
- 🧠 Stroke hospitalizations rise sharply among people aged 40–65, particularly among African-American and Caribbean-American adults.
- 

Most common triggers for “holiday heart”:

- Excessive salt and alcohol.
- Emotional stress.
- Overeating.
- Dehydration and sleep deprivation.
- Ignoring warning signs (“I’ll get checked after the holidays”).

**“The season of joy should not be the season of stroke.”**





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## Health by the Numbers: The Hidden Holiday Health Crisis



Across the Caribbean and its diaspora, festive meals and cultural traditions bring comfort — but also risk.

According to PAHO (Pan American Health Organization, 2025):

- 💧 Heart disease and stroke account for 35–40% of all deaths in the Caribbean.
- 🏠 1 in 3 adults has high blood pressure, but half don't know it.
- 🍲 Caribbean diets now include more processed and imported foods high in salt, sugar, and saturated fat.
- 🏃♂️ Physical inactivity has increased by 20% over the last decade.
- 🩺 Men aged 35–55 have the highest rate of stroke-related deaths, often triggered by stress and poor diet.
- 💬 Caribbean–New York immigrants are 30% more likely to experience hypertension than non-immigrant Black adults.

### Holiday Impact:

In Caribbean households, festive cooking can push daily sodium intake to 4,000–6,000 mg, double or triple the safe amount.

Add stress, alcohol, and lack of rest — and the perfect storm begins.

Category	Key Statistic	Source
Recommended Sodium	2,300 mg/day (1 teaspoon salt)	CDC, 2025
U.S. Average Intake	3,400 mg/day	CDC, 2025
Caribbean Average	4,000–6,000 mg/day	PAHO, 2025
Risk of Stroke	Doubles when Sodium Intake > 5,000 mg	WHO, 2025
Hidden Sources	70% of salt comes from packaged foods	AHA, 2025





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## 10 Myths About Stress, Stroke & Salt — Busted!

**Myth:** “Stress can’t kill you — it’s just in your head.”

**Fact:** Chronic stress physically damages the heart and arteries. It raises blood pressure, triggers inflammation, and doubles stroke risk. Mental health is not imaginary — it’s internal medicine.

**Myth:** “Only old people get strokes.”

**Fact:** Stroke can strike at any age.

Caribbean-American adults in their 30s and 40s are increasingly affected due to stress, poor diet, and high blood pressure.

💬 If you have pressure, diabetes, or smoke, **age is no protection.**

**Myth:** “I know my pressure by how I feel.”

**Fact:** High blood pressure has no symptoms until damage occurs.

You can feel “fine” and still have dangerously high readings. **Always check — don’t guess.**

**Myth:** “It’s just salt — I don’t eat much anyway.”

**Fact:** 70% of sodium comes from processed food, not your salt shaker. Even small “hidden” amounts in canned soups, meats, and sauces add up quickly.

**Myth:** “I only get headaches — that’s not stroke.”

**Fact:** Headaches, jaw tightness, or dizziness can be early warning signs.

Other subtle stroke symptoms include confusion, blurred vision, or sudden fatigue. When in doubt, go F.A.S.T. — Face, Arm, Speech, Time.

**“The season of joy should not be the season of stroke.”**





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## 10 Myths About Stress, Stroke & Salt — Busted!

**Myth:** “I’m too busy to rest — I’ll sleep when I’m done.”

**Fact:** Sleep deprivation is a major trigger for heart rhythm problems and strokes. Every hour of lost sleep increases blood pressure and disrupts hormone balance.

**Myth:** “If my family has high blood pressure, there’s nothing I can do.”

**Fact:** Genetics may load the gun — lifestyle pulls the trigger. You can control your risk through food, exercise, and medication adherence.

**Myth:** “Natural or herbal remedies can’t hurt.”

**Fact:** Some herbal teas (like licorice root) and supplements raise blood pressure or interact with medication. Always tell your doctor about any bush medicine or supplements you use.

**Myth:** “The holidays are for relaxing — my stress will go away.”

**Fact:** Most holiday activities increase stress: hosting, travel, family dynamics, and finances. Without intentional rest and boundaries, stress accumulates — and so does risk.

**10 Myth:** “I’ll deal with it after the holidays.”

**Fact:** Delaying treatment during the holidays is a common cause of preventable deaths.

High blood pressure, chest pain, or vision changes are medical emergencies — not holiday inconveniences.

**“Tomorrow” is not a treatment plan.**





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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT



## ACTION STEPS TO REDUCE STROKE RISK



Maintain a  
healthy diet



Monitor  
blood pressure



Take medications  
as prescribed



Exercise  
regularly



Manage  
stress



Attend medical  
appointments

## PREVENTION



EAT  
HEALTHY



BE  
ACTIVE



MAINTAIN A  
HEALTHY  
WEIGHT



GET  
SCREENED





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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT



## CHECK QUICK CHECKLIST

Based on U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and Community Health

	DONE	DUE
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>A1C (DIABETES LABS)</b> If abnormal, every 3-12 monthths		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>BLOOD PRESSURE</b> Once a year		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>CHOLESTEROL/LIPIDS</b> Every 4-6 years		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>PROSTATE SCREENING</b> Starting at 50* / <b>MAMOGRAPHY</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>COLON CANCER SCREENING</b> Starting at 45**		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>LUNG CANCER SCREENING</b> If smoker: through age 80		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>CALCIUM SCORE (HEART RISK)</b> If family hx of heart dx or high cholesterol		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>DENTAL EXAMS + CLEANING</b> Every 6 months		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>VACCINES</b> Ask doctor		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>COGNITIVE + MOOD</b> Consider at 65		<input type="checkbox"/>







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# HEALTH & WELLNESS GLOBAL IMPACT



**Adults need a mix of physical activity to stay healthy.**

**Moderate-intensity aerobic activity\***

Anything that gets your heart beating faster counts.

at least **150 minutes a week**

Icons: person on a bicycle, person swimming, person walking a dog, person pushing a stroller, person playing tennis.

**Muscle-strengthening activity**

Do activities that make your muscles work harder than usual.

at least **2 days a week**

Icons: person doing a push-up, person doing a lunge.

AND

\* If you prefer vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (like running), aim for at least 75 minutes a week.

If that's more than you can do right now, **do what you can.** Even 5 minutes of physical activity has real health benefits.

Walk. Run. Dance. Play. **What's your move?**

**MyPlate.gov**

## MOVE MORE & EAT MORE (Healthy)



**UPCOMING EVENTS**  
**START STRONG – January 2026 Health Reset -**  
 Heart Health • New Year Habits • Healthy Weight



5 servings fruits/veggies daily **Nutrition**
 30 mins/day **Fitness**
 10 mins mindfulness
 8 glasses/day **Hydration**
 7 hrs/night **Sleep**