

‘Race is not a biological risk factor’: American Heart Association reassesses use of race in calculating risk of heart attacks and strokes

Doctors have long relied on a few key patient characteristics to assess risk of a heart attack or stroke, using a calculus that considers blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking and diabetes status, as well as demographics: age, sex and race.

Now, the American Heart Association is taking race out of the equation.

The overhaul of [the widely used cardiac-risk](#) algorithm is an acknowledgment that, unlike sex or age, race identification in and of itself is not a biological risk factor.

The scientists who modified the algorithm decided from the start that race itself did not belong in clinical tools used to guide medical decision making, even though race might serve as a proxy for certain social circumstances, genetic predispositions or environmental exposures that raise the risk of cardiovascular disease.

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But race has been used in algorithms as a stand-in for a range of factors that are working against Black Americans, [cardiologist Dr. Sadiya] Khan said. It’s not clear to scientists what all of those risks are. If they were better understood, “we could address them and work to modify them,” she said.

[This is an excerpt. Read the full article here](#)