African-Americans most likely to stick with their New Year's Resolution to get healthier

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CHICAGO, IL â€" The majority of Americans resolve to live a healthier lifestyle every January but African-Americans are the ones most likely to actually do it, according to a new study by global market research firm Synovate.

According to Synovate research, blacks were more likely than others to say that they are concerned enough about their health to consider modifying their lifestyles. Nearly two-thirds of African-Americans of all ages - somewhat less among youth, and gradually increasing with age - reported that they wanted to make health changes.

These intentions translated into action: just over half (54%) of African-Americans reported having changed their eating habits within the past year. By comparison, 41% of Hispanics and 39% of other groups made modifications during the same period.

Some of this resolve may be fueled by the very real health crises among African-Americans. Diet and exercise choices that blacks have made historically seem to be factors in the disproportionate occurrence of weight gain and obesity, as well as associated conditions like diabetes and hypertension. A quarter of African-American women older than 55 have diabetes, and black women are 69% more likely than their white counterparts to die of heart disease, according to Rovenia Brock, PhD, a.k.a. Dr. Ro, author of Dr. Ro's 10 Secrets to Livin' Healthy and host of BET's Heart & Soul.

"Overall, people know what to do. They've heard all too often what not to do," says Dr. Ro, "When you ask people to give up their culture to be healthy, they're offended. They shouldn't have to [feel that way]."

Surprisingly, African-American baby boomers are not typically targeted by companies selling fitness gear and equipment, low-fat foods and other healthy lifestyle products, especially compared to the youth market. Among 18-to-24-year-olds, three-quarters of African-Americans reported exercising in the past month, whereas only 64% of the general market and 60% of Hispanics said they had.

"With over 600 billion dollars in buying power, the African American consumer should be a focus for all multinational businesses, including fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), technology and healthcare," said Everett Hernandez, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Synovateâ€™s Diversity Group.

Synovate's extensive research on ethnic markets in the U.S. will be published in more detail in its 2006 U.S. Diversity Markets Report, which will be released in February.