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Dedication

Foreword/Pauletta Washington, Actress
and wife of Academy Award winner, Denzel Washington

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LIVING WELL...DESPITE CATCHIN' HELL:
The Black Woman's Guide to Health, Sex and Happiness
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Author: Melody T. McCloud, M.D. // www.DrMcCloud.com

SUMMARY of CHAPTERS:

Chapter 1: With Michelle Obama in the White House and other notable, visible Blacks, are we “post-racial”? And is the image of Black women automatically elevated? The still-present effect of social rejection still exists and, in turn, is, affecting our health. Health in other races is compared to that of Blacks. Women are told **the goal is not to be like White or Asian women, but to be *healthier Black women***. An overview of Black women’s health statistics is given. **My “Societal Stress and Black Women’s Health: A Rejection Connection” flowchart** is presented (in color) *which clearly links the effect social stress and rejection has on Black women’s health*. No other health book has specified these factors so clearly (if at all). These stressors, and how they adversely affect our health, are carried throughout the book, and info is given re: how to live well, in spite of them.

Chapter 2: The **top five conditions taking Black women’s lives are heart disease, obesity/diabetes, infant mortality, deaths from cancers and HIV/AIDS**. Early detection is stressed, as is **personal responsibility** concerning heart health, diet, getting early prenatal care and using discretion before engaging in sex.

Chapter 3: A review of the female structure and function (anatomy and physiology). Also discuss basic **GYN conditions including vaginitis, fibroid tumors and more**.

Chapter 4: Menopause, hormone replacement, and encouragement to embrace this time of life is presented.

Chapter 5: More than just OB-GYN topics, this book has **info about the bladder, lung diseases, eye conditions and ailments afflicting joints and bones**.

Chapter 6: The **benefits of sex are highlighted; hang-ups are discussed**. An explanation of **sexual dysfunction**, such as inability to achieve orgasm and lack of desire is given. Does Viagra work in women? **Women are encouraged to have a positive attitude about sex. BUT...also be armed with knowledge about STDs**, because sex, though enjoyable and good for you, can be dangerous. A complete look at STDs in the Black community is presented. Once armed with all that knowledge, readers are given a treat in the form of **what to do to enhance the positive love-making experience** (aphrodisiacs and foods, etc.) and **a few love poems are offered as a treat** to end the chapter.

Chapter 7: Blacks may feel that the media defines them; or that only women you see in the media define them. This chapter encourages women to not fall prey to that trap. Own

and know *yourself* and take steps to achieve what you want in life. **If left to the media, people might think there are only 1-2 “good” “successful” Black women in America.** You know Oprah; you know Michelle Obama; you know the news anchors. But in an attempt to give voice and visibility to other successful Black women who *aren't* nationally known, a short list of successful Black women is given and readers are encouraged to uplift and support each other. No more “crab barrel syndrome”; there’s room for everyone to climb higher.

Chapter 8: Current statistics for Black-on-Black marriage are quite bleak; it’s as if Black women are often passed over in the relationship department. This chapter examines some of the stats in that area, **how Black men and women can do better in relating to each other and how the stress of being head-of-household (and, many without loving relationships) can cause psychological stress which, in turn, can cause physical stress, damaging health.** Women are encouraged to **expand their social circles,** consider **interracial dating;** not lose their heads if they don't have a man...and to *smile!* And with or without a man, “sister-friends” are supportive and vital to a woman’s soul.

Chapter 9: Some of the medical “pearls of wisdom” used by physicians to heal the body are also applicable to healing relationships. I provide some of these pearls to help maintain healthy relationships. But, sometimes relationships need to end, especially in the face of **domestic violence/intimate partner violence (IPV).** **Rates for IPV in the Black community are provided. Black women are at high risk, and are frequent victims of IPV.**

Chapter 10: The advertising world has rarely been a Black woman’s friend, though some companies are offering more options (and opportunities) for Black women. **Make the best of your beauty. Proper care of hair, skin, teeth is given, as is info on Blacks and plastic surgery.**

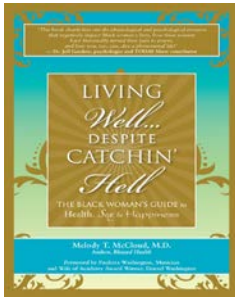
Chapter 11: The high rate of hypertension in the Black community can, in turn, cause high rates of Alzheimer’s and senile dementia in Blacks. Emotional pain, the pain of poverty and how to keep the brain moving is discussed. That **the brain responds to emotional pain the same as it does to physical pain** is demonstrated in a brain image. **Despite social pain/rejection, Black women are soaring in many areas,** as they engage their phenomenal spirits.

Chapter 12: Yes, we are in a difficult time, but **many Black women are living well and others aspire to do just that.** A plan to secure a healthy way of life for young Black girls is given; it includes “Close Your Legs. Be Well Read. Tend that Body and Sweat that Head.” And a “tough love” prescription for the future of Black America is offered. Readers are encouraged to perhaps forget about “reparations” (they are unlikely to come), but to look forward, affirm themselves and take action—today—to secure the future they want, and, in this land, is possible for them to attain and *live well* in grand style!

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## SPECIAL FEATURES of

### *LIVING WELL...DESPITE CATCHIN' HELL: The Black Woman's Guide to Health, Sex and Happiness*



► **The first book in *eight* years specifically written to address the health of Black women**—the female demographic rarely, if ever, mentioned by other “TV” doctors.

► Has received high praise from nationally-known medical, lay and celebrity endorsers: **Foreword** by **Pauletta Washington**, wife of Academy Award (and Tony Award) winner, Denzel Washington **Endorsements** by TODAY Show contributor, psychologist **Dr. Jeff Gardere**, Boston University Professor Emeritus of Obstetrics-Gynecology, **Dr. Kenneth C. Edelin**, HBCUs and others.

► Accepted for inclusion in the U. S. Health & Human Services Office of Minority Health Resource Center's (OMHRC) Knowledge Center. **Accession #: MH11D10057**

► Steps on some toes, as it bravely calls out some well-known celebrities to task for the effect their images/conduct has on “real world” Black women and social imagery. That some highly-prominent, beloved Black female celebrities rarely give voice and visibility to other Black women is also addressed. Addresses colorism, “crab barrel syndrome” and more. Also hot/provocative social commentary.

► The author's (and first-of-its-kind) “**Societal Stress and Black Women's Health: The 'Rejection Connection'**” *color* flowchart clearly demonstrates how social stressors affect Black women's physical health.



► **Medical topics are head-to-toe**; they include not only ob-gyn conditions, but heart disease, diabetes, lupus, sarcoidosis, eye diseases, respiratory ailments, arthritis, HIV, STDs and more. The bar graphs are “eye-opening,” according to reviewers.

► **Informative and stimulating discussion of sex**; includes exploring sexual hang-ups, sexual dysfunction, STDs and a “treat” of erotic/love poems to end the chapter.

► **Extensive bibliography**; well-referenced...crossing many disciplines. Visual texture.

► Written by a Black female obstetrician-gynecologist who also penned *Blessed Health* (Simon & Schuster, 2003). The author lectures nationwide on health, sex, media images and social issues. She is a health consultant to the Tom Joyner Morning Show and hosts the blog at *Psychology Today*: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/black-womens-health-and-happiness>. Author's website: [www.DrMcCloud.com](http://www.DrMcCloud.com).

*Living Well...Despite Catchin' Hell* is professional medical advice, sexology, sociology, psychology, dashes of pop culture and *hefty* doses of personal responsibility.

## *Introduction*

Sex, health, happiness and wealth...you know you want it! And there's no better time than now for "having it all and 'gettin' it good!"

I am excited to offer you *Living Well...Despite Catchin' Hell: The Black Woman's Guide to Health, Sex and Happiness* as the one-stop source you can reference on your quest to achieve total wellness, happiness and health in *every* important aspect of your life.

Like a fine wine, 21<sup>st</sup>-century women are only getting better with every passing day, and that includes women of color. Many modern-day Black women are more highly educated than our predecessors. Many of us own businesses or successfully compete in corporate America. Some of us are wives, mothers or care-giving daughters, while others are doctors, accountants, judges, pilots, investment managers, nurses and elected officials. Undoubtedly many of today's Black women are carving out lives about which our great-great-grandmothers may have only dreamed...if they dared.

Yes...the 21<sup>st</sup>-century affords all women—including women of color—a new day for reaping every bit of what makes life worthwhile. In many instances, all you have to do is reach out and grab it; go for the gusto!

But in today's world the only thing many Black women want to reach for is the television remote to turn off the images that barrage our psyche almost every day of our lives. Whether it's a news report of some Black woman "behaving badly" in her community, or watching others willfully participate in music videos which are anything but respectful to women and/or their bodies.

On the nightly news, we see too many young Black men (would-be husbands, or could-be successful businessmen) carted off to jail, or we are subjected to the likes of national radio jock and TV host, Don Imus, calling Black women "nappy-headed hos" and former New York Knicks coach, Isiah Thomas, intimating "it's okay for Black men to call Black women a 'bitch'."

In times of stress, to relax the mind or just get a groove on, many people turn to music. But many modern-day "songs" are anything but soothing to many a Black woman's ear and spirit. Song lyrics have gone from "My Cherie Amour" to "bitch, ho, slut and whore," or, Black men sing of killing a cop or "poppin' a cap" in somebody's derriere. (It is even painful for me to write these words; but if we're going to address the matter head on, we have to deal with it—and the specific language—as it is, for it is that very language that pierces many of our souls.) These are just a few examples of the external social factors that affect many Black women on a daily basis.

Whether created to intentionally hurt us, or done purely as sport or perceived "creativity" (without a social conscience, some might say), these disparaging comments and visions do have a conscious, and subconscious, effect

not only on *our* psyche, but that of others who also see and hear these negative characterizations of our gender and race.

Granted, some of our younger Black sisters “don’t have a problem,” or, “don’t see what the big deal is” with these frequent images and comments on TV and in videos. We will address that perspective within these pages. But the majority of Black women I know personally, and many I address, or hear from, when I’m lecturing across the country, are pained and sorely vexed by the constant barrage of negative imagery of today’s Black woman. They are also concerned about what message it sends to young Black boys and girls, and how they are—or will be—perceived by others throughout their lives.

As if the sport-like attack on our psyche and image isn’t enough, our physical bodies also face formidable, seemingly insurmountable, challenges, and in these pages you will see how the medical and psycho-social factors clearly interrelate.

Despite many government initiatives to abate ethnic health disparities, Black women still carry the highest incidence of, and the poorest prognosis for, medical conditions affecting practically every organ system in the body. Black women are more obese than other demographics. We carry the highest mortality rate for many killer diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, infant mortality, HIV/AIDS and more. Black women have a shorter life expectancy than other female demographics.

Compared to women of other races, Black women are least likely to get married; and for decades, Black women’s natural physical attributes have been criticized, but when purchased by others, those same attributes are deemed desirable, sexy and alluring.

Poor health statistics and prognosis, a shortage of marriage-worthy men, and misogynistic images in the media...these facts raise a few questions in many Black women’s minds: *What’s up, God? Why do Black women seem to catch so much hell? Did someone declare “open season” on us, and if so, why?*

In the book *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker wrote, “All my life, I’ve had to fight.” Many Black women relate to that declaration and many wonder *just how much should a Black woman be made to bear*.

Yet, given all the stress Black women face, it is amazing that we have the lowest rate of suicide compared to any other demographic in American society. This is a remarkable testament to the resiliency, strength, fortitude, focus, faith and psychological constitution of Black women. So we press on. We not only survive, but many of us thrive, amidst the societal stress on our physical health and the emotional pain of social rejection—pain that hardly any seem to acknowledge or validate. It is easy to imagine that many of our souls cry the words of an old Gospel hymn: “Give me something to hold on to. Comfort me. Comfort me.” Now, here’s a book to do just that.

In the pages of *Living Well*, you will find staggering statistics and an unfortunate legacy of Black women's health. True. But you will also find tools and medical information that can liberate you, and Black women everywhere, from a similar fate. As you review and compare the health statistics across racial lines, remember one thing: The goal isn't to *be like* White or Asian women; the goal is to *be healthier* Black women.

This book provides an up-to-date, head-to-toe medical reference, with information that will carry you for years to come. In these pages you will gain valuable information and updates on heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, cancers, visual problems and arthritic conditions. Mid-life "female" problems such as "dropped" bladder, urinary incontinence, fibroid tumors, pelvic pain, unintended pregnancies (it can happen!) and more will be presented.

Are you menopausal, yet are utterly confused about hormonal replacement therapy? This book is for you.

As women of color, society has often worked against our pursuit of happiness. Either we're not pretty enough, if deemed pretty at all. We're often too fat, and sometimes too thin (yes, there is such a thing). Our skin is too light for some Blacks and too dark for the rest of the world...and for some Black men. (Oh yes...we're going to "keep it real" in the pages of *Living Well...Despite Catchin' Hell.*)

To find happiness in a world of frequent, near-daily rejection, it is important to have inner strength, self-assurance, emotional balance and reliable friends and family. This book will give you useful tips to achieve inner peace, to keep your brain active and alert, and to avoid toxic people. It will advise on how you can capitalize on your best traits, and if needed, minimize those traits you find less desirable, or that impede your personal or professional goals.

The importance of proper diet and physical activity on increasing endorphin secretion—the "feel good" body chemicals—will be stressed. Hair and skin care will be presented. Lastly, unique medical pearls of wisdom will help you improve your interpersonal relationships. I will also share a few anecdotes of my life's journey; perhaps they will encourage you to keep moving forward when you feel you just can't take another step.

And no one-stop women's health guide would be complete without a discussion about sex.

Some men may say that "*any sex is good sex,*" but sometimes certain factors get in the way of fully enjoying the experience that love-making was meant to be. In these pages you will learn to identify any residual sexual hang-ups you may have so that you can fully enjoy, and benefit from, sex.

Do you have trouble achieving orgasm or experience pain with intercourse? Are you wondering if Viagra works in women? And how can you enjoy sex in a day of rampant sexually-transmitted diseases and men "on the down-low"? This book offers you sage advice.

Do you need advice on spicing up your love life? Or help going from frumpy to foxy for your man? When it comes to sex, are you creative and unpredictable, or the boring same-o, same-o? Fret not; you've come to the right place!

To complete your total wellness makeover, you will learn how to get or keep your financial portfolio healthy.

We'll also celebrate, and give voice and visibility to, some of our Black sisters who envisioned a business or product they wanted to create; women who followed through on their idea, reached their goal...and now own million-dollar companies. No "crab barrel syndrome" here; I am a strong proponent of lifting each other up—there's room for everybody. Isn't it past time we become helpers one to another?

Have you ever noticed that the plight of Black women's health is rarely, if ever, addressed at length in other women's health books? Well, in these pages you will find information applicable to *your* specific medical, spiritual, emotional and social needs as a Black woman. And it's about time, because the fact is your concerns and challenges *are* different from the health status of other women.

I am excited for you and me. Despite the doom and gloom of the past, it is possible for Black women to achieve medial parity and live the best, healthiest life possible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need not give up hope, for there have been, and will continue to be, victories and successes in the lives of women whose skin has been bountifully kissed by the sun.

But our stories of success, healthy living and happiness are rarely, if ever, told to the masses, or shared within our ranks. As never before, this can yet be our time to shine, as many of us are living well past the statistical projections of life and death...and doing so in healthy, fine, fun and sexy style! *Living Well...Despite Catchin' Hell* will be the long-needed, one-stop source of a good word that can encourage, educate, comfort and celebrate you, me, and Black women everywhere.

This is a new day and an exciting time in health care technology, research education and improved medical outcomes, and no woman—whether Asian, Hispanic, Native American, White or *Black*—should be left behind. Not any more.

"Healthy" and "happy" are aspirations many Black women enjoy, and others seek to attain. It can be done; the journey begins with just one step. With this book, your 21<sup>st</sup>-century journey to total wellness, physical health and phenomenal living can begin right now.

## Proven Benefits of Sex

