

A 'Fight' to End Stroke

✖ Gospel artist Kirk Franklin is teaming up with the American Heart Association's Power to End Stroke campaign to launch the Fight of Our Life health tour to raise awareness of the risk of stroke.

The seven-city concert tour begins tonight in Houston and targets African-Americans, among whom stroke is the third-leading cause of death and a leading cause of long-term disability. Compared to their white counterparts, African-Americans have almost twice the risk of first-ever strokes, according to the American Heart Association (AHA).

Franklin said he hopes the tour will empower concertgoers to take control of their health.

"Stroke is a serious health issue that is claiming the lives of our loved ones, and we're bringing increased awareness to help stop this devastation in our communities," Franklin said. "It's time to stand up and do something about the thousands of people who are dying every year from stroke."

In recent years, the Power to End Stroke campaign has teamed with other African-American Christian leaders, including pastors Lyle and Deborah Dukes of Harvest Life Changers Church International in Woodbridge, Va. The couple became campaign spokespeople last year.

Also in 2008, the AHA sponsored an eight-month health competition involving more than a dozen California churches. The congregations promoted physical activity, good nutrition and health education to compete for a cash donation to their churches.

The theme of Franklin's tour is taken from his 2007 album *The*

Fight of My Life, and his hit single “Declaration” is the underlying message of the campaign. During concerts, Franklin will ask attendees to make a declaration to take control of their health, reduce their risk for stroke and learn the warning signs of stroke.

Evelyn Young, a stroke survivor and AHA spokeswoman, believes the tour will help begin needed discussions about heart health among African-Americans.

“Stroke is such a devastating disease for our community, and it seems that no one ever talks about it or thinks that it can happen to them,” Young said. “Partnering with Kirk Franklin will help bolster awareness. He is a talented person who has an amazing way of connecting with people, and he embodies the lifestyle of healthy eating and fitness.”

After starting in Houston tonight, the tour will travel to the Texas cities of San Antonio, Arlington and Austin; Tulsa, Okla.; Oklahoma City; and Little Rock, Ark. In each stop, Franklin also will audition local gospel artists for an opportunity to become his opening act.