

Protecting Your Heart

Hear attacks have become common nowadays. A good proportion of our fellow humans are either at the risk of getting heart disease or have already been diagnosed with it. According to Dr Priya Chockalingam of Cardiac Wellness Institute in Chennai, cardiovascular diseases such as heart attack, stroke and blood vessel disorders are the biggest threat today. In fact, the World Health Organization has estimated that over 17 million die due to cardiovascular disease annually and the vast majority of these are from low and middle income countries like India. She also says that it is claiming more lives than ever before. In an interaction with the THP team, she explains the risk factors involved, symptoms, treatment options available and preventive measures.

What are the risk factors involved?

Ans: Risk factors can be divided into lifestyle and genetic. Lifestyle risk factors include diabetes, hypertension, abnormal cholesterol, inadequate exercise, unhealthy diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, excessive stress, anxiety and depression. These are always caused by lifestyle choices; and the good news is they are modifiable. Even if someone has a genetic predisposition, he/she can ward off disease by choosing heart-healthy habits and regular health checks. Recent research has shown that Asians have a higher risk of diabetes and heart disease and that too at a much earlier age than their western counterparts.

How can an individual identify if he/she is experiencing a heart attack?

Ans: Any unusual pain or discomfort in the upper part of the body could be due to heart attack. Apart from chest pain, any pain in the left shoulder or arm, jaw, neck, upper abdomen or upper back should be evaluated. Breathlessness, giddiness, excessive sweating, heartburn, nausea and vomiting are some of the other symptoms of heart ailments.

How are the treatment options for heart disease in India compared to other countries?

Ans: Presently, the treatment options in India are on par with other developed countries. As on date, drug therapy, invasive procedures and surgical treatment are the three options available. Heart transplants

which were a distant dream a couple of decades ago are being performed with excellent results today. Going forward we expect personalized medicine and gene therapy to gain traction.

Who is at higher risk of getting heart attack? Men or women?

Ans: People of all genders and ages are falling prey to heart attack because of their unhealthy lifestyle. Chronic stress is one of the most important factors in the current scenario. It leads to behavioural risk such as lack of exercise, improper eating habits, and addiction to tobacco and alcohol which in turn give rise to metabolic derangements like obesity, diabetes, hypertension and abnormal cholesterol, thus paving the way for heart attack and stroke.

Can you tell us about the cardiac rehabilitation scene in India?

Ans: Referral to cardiac rehab has become mandatory in the west while in India it is just gaining momentum. We at Cardiac Wellness Institute strive to offer individualized

cardiac rehabilitation to our patients who have had a heart attack, heart failure, bypass surgery, stenting and any other cardiac related problems. A patient who has just suffered with cardiac problem immediately rushes to a cardiologist. The duty of a cardiologist does not get over just with surgeries and prescriptions. It extends further more by finding the root cause of the problem and counsel the patients and their heirs who is at the risk of genetic disproportion. Though this takes a long way in disease control the Cardiac Wellness Institute has been founded in a futuristic vision to reduce the fatality and disability due to cardio-

vascular diseases. Our fundamental focus is prevention and rehabilitation of heart disease. As sudden death is very often the first manifestation of disease, prevention plays an extremely important role.

What are the preventive measures you suggest for people to stay away from the risk of getting heart related ailments? Will cardiovascular exercises help one better?

Ans: Yes, exercise of any kind will be of great help in staying away from lifestyle diseases that lead to cardiac ailments. Brisk walking for at least 30 minutes everyday in the



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morning or evening would be sufficient. But one has to plan their day accordingly. Indulging in a variety of aerobic exercises like cycling, swimming, jogging, running, rowing and dancing will also help one in combating heart disease. Strength training is equally important for overall fitness. The guidance of a fitness trainer or physiotherapist should be sought if you are taking

up a new exercise after the age of 40 or have been diagnosed with diabetes or hypertension. And what we eat matters. Balanced diet is the key for staying healthy. Alcohol in any form, as well as active and passive smoking should be totally avoided. Mind-body techniques like yoga, meditation, tai chi and deep breathing should be practiced on a regular basis to relieve stress.

What is your say on alternate medicine in curing heart disease?

Ans: As far as allopathy is concerned, everything is scientifically proven. But in other medicines, there isn't strong scientific evidences. It's good if they can cure, but one should be informed about the side effects involved. Irrespective of what form of medicine you follow, a healthy lifestyle is irreplaceable.

MAKING PEOPLE WALK

Cardiac Wellness Institute organized a morning walk on 13 March 2016 at Elliot's Beach in Chennai. This was on the backdrop of a heart healthy life and the motto of the programme was to make people walk. Students from Avvai Home and elders from Vishranthi Home for Destitute joined the walk. Apart from the usual crowd on a Sunday morning, many from remote pockets of the city came as well.

Dr Priya Chockalingam said, "Walk Chennai Walk" was the first of a series of events we have planned to raise awareness about a healthy lifestyle and at the same time to contribute to a social cause. In this case it was women's health and education initiatives such as Avvai Home, Vishranthi and vocational training centre for women. The response was great – we had people of all ages and walks of life participating enthusiastically."

