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**heart**



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People the world over are highly concerned about heart disease because it is the No.1 killer. As Indians, we should be much more seriously worried because we are three times more vulnerable than, say, Europeans to a heart attack because of genetic factors. Heart diseases in our region grew by 300% in the last 30 years and are still growing by 2-3% every year. WHO projects that by 2015 one million people under the age of 40 will die from this disease and 60% of heart patients in the world are likely to be in India.

We may not be able to choose our parents but we can take many measures to prevent the onset of heart disease in the first place. If in the unfortunate event of becoming a victim of heart disease, we can promptly act to minimize its consequences. We should, therefore, have some basic understanding of heart disease.

### What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is any disorder that affects the heart's ability to function normally. Various forms of heart disease include:

- Coronary artery disease (the most common form of heart disease resulting in heart attacks) –results in narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries
- Arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms)
- Heart valve diseases
- Congenital heart disease(defects in the heart present at birth)
- cardiomyopathy(damage to the heart muscle)
- Heart failure

A heart attack occurs when one or more of the tiny arteries supplying the heart with oxygen-rich blood (coronary arteries) become blocked. Blockages are caused by a blood clot that forms suddenly where a coronary artery has narrowed over the years from a buildup of cholesterol and other substances known as plaque. Interrupted blood flow to the heart can damage or destroy a part of the heart muscle.

### Symptoms of Heart disease:

Warning signs and symptoms of a heart disease include:

- Pressure, fullness or a squeezing pain in the center of the chest
- Pain extending beyond the chest to shoulder, arm, back, or even to teeth and jaw
- Increasing episodes of chest pain/Prolonged pain in the upper abdomen
- Palpitations
- Left arm numbness with exertion
- Shortness of breath/fatigue
- Sweating/ nausea and vomiting
- Swelling around the ankles
- Lightheadedness
- Fainting

### Diagnosis & treatment:

Doctors perform a number of tests to find out if one is having or vulnerable to a heart attack. They include: Electrocardiogram (ECG), blood tests, chest X-ray, echocardiogram and angiogram.

Initially, doctors try to pre-empt a heart problem with medication. But some people do suffer a heart attack despite medication.

If the tests reveal that a person has suffered a heart attack because of the blockage or narrowing of coronary arteries, doctors have three options to provide relief to the patient. One is giving medicines . Other two options added sometimes are-angioplasty and bypass surgery.

Angioplasty is a medical procedure, which widens narrowed or blocked arteries. Angioplasty relieves chest pain and reduces the risk of heart attack. Bypass surgery involves sewing veins or arteries in place at a site beyond a blocked or narrowed coronary artery (bypassing the narrowed section), restoring blood flow to the heart.



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## Can't we prevent heart attacks?

The answer is: **yes** and **no**.

Certain factors, called coronary risk factors, increase the risk of a heart attack by contributing to the build up of plaque in arteries including the coronary arteries. We don't have control over certain factors, which make us vulnerable to heart disease. There are certain factors which we can modify and minimize the risk.

### Non-modifiable Risk Factors:

The three factors that are out of our control are:

- Age
- Gender
- Genetics and Family History

### Modifiable Risk Factors:

Following are the modifiable risk factors:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Stress
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity
- Unhealthy diet

By taking care of these, you can ward off heart disease for years or minimize its havoc. You should, however, appreciate that even if you do all the right things suggested here, you may not be totally immune from heart disease.

## Metabolic Syndrome

One out of every three Indian men and one out of every two Indian women have metabolic syndrome. Any person with metabolic syndrome has a 42% higher chance of getting coronary artery disease and diabetes within the next 20 years.

You have metabolic syndrome if at least 3 of the following are true:

- You are overweight or obese and you carry the weight around your middle.
- You have high blood pressure and you have a high amount of sugar in your blood
- You have a high amount of fat in your blood
- You have low HDL cholesterol

The more of these risk factors you have, the higher your risk of heart disease. Even if your cholesterol level is normal, you still may be at risk for a heart attack or stroke.

### Medications

Along with lifestyle changes, your doctor may recommend certain medications to prevent or control heart disease. One is the simple drug aspirin. Aspirin has been shown to reduce strokes in women and heart attacks in men. Drugs known as 'Statins' lower LDL, the bad cholesterol. These drugs prevent the onset of heart disease and the progression of heart disease if you already have it. Beta Blockers are

another class of drugs that are effective in protecting people who have already had a heart attack. They are also helpful in controlling blood pressure and controlling angina(chest discomfort) due to a blockage in the artery.

You need not construe heart disease as a disaster. You can minimize its consequences if you follow a healthy lifestyle and take medication as prescribed by your doctor.

### 5 medication-free strategies to help prevent heart disease:

You can prevent heart disease by following a heart-healthy lifestyle. Here are five strategies to help you protect your heart.

- 1.Don't smoke or use tobacco products
- 2.Get active-walk for 20-30minutes atleast 4-5 times in a week
- 3.Eat a heart-healthy diet
- 4.Maintain a healthy weight
- 5.Get regular health screenings

### Eating a heart-healthy diet

#### Instead of :

Frying your food

Eating convenience food (canned soups, TV dinners, frozen pizza )

Using butter or oil high in saturated fat

## Prevention pays

Heart disease is often avoidable. Following a heart-healthy lifestyle doesn't have to be complicated. Find ways to include heart-healthy habits into your lifestyle — and you may well enjoy a healthier life for years to come. And **DO NOT FORGET** to take Health Insurance for you and your loved ones to get the best care in case affected by heart disease.

#### Try :

Baking, boiling, steaming, poaching, or grilling your food

Eating fresh fish, meats, fruits, and vegetables

Using products low in saturated fat, such as olive oil, vegetable oil, canola oil, or chicken broth