



**wellness WATCH**

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# Heart to HEART

**There's a key message on World Heart Day today. Listen to your heart or it may be too late**

**WORLD HEART DAY**

**WAY TO GO**

- Get regular health check-ups
- Quit smoking and the use of tobacco products
- Eat sensibly, exercise regularly and maintain body weight

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**A**S YOU flip newspaper pages this Sunday, don't be surprised to get inundated with stories and advertisements extolling the virtues of a healthy lifestyle for maintaining a healthy heart. In fact, media blitzkrieg will be at its best this World Heart Day with important messages on this key health issue.

And not without a reason. A mere look at some key stats will make you connect. In India, you are three times more prone to heart diseases than in the West, triggered by a host of risk factors such as genetic predisposition, environmental hazards, sedentary lifestyle, dietary indiscretion, tobacco use and lack of physical activity. What's worse, heart disease does not discriminate — it is the number one killer worldwide and it's estimated that 80% of cardiovascular-related deaths occur in low and middle income nations. India is also set to see a dramatic number of working age people (35-65 years old) die of cardiovascular disease in the next 30 years.

Spare a thought. I am sure now you'd understand that reams of column space are not being doled out by key stakeholders just for re-stating the obvious. There're some important takeaways or points of introspection as well. In fact, going ahead, doctors feel, people should now ask themselves some hard questions when it comes to matters of heart. "When we are told about the risk of heart disease, it seems so far off. We don't see it as something that relates to us. But the fact is that heart diseases are spreading like an epidemic. The good news, however, is that no one is doomed

by uncontrollable factors. It's time we take charge of our own well being," says Dr Roopa Salwan, consultant cardiologist and head of intensive care unit, Max Hospital. Learn and live.

For the uninitiated, cardiovascular disease is a broad term used to describe a range of diseases that affects the heart, blood vessels and results from the build up of fat deposits in the arteries that clog the circulation. It includes heart attack, heart failure, stroke and coronary artery disease. What you need to understand is that hardening of the arteries is a gradual process that begins in the twenties. "There are certain known and unknown risk factors that increase the progression of disease. The known risk factors are smoking, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, elevated blood cholesterol or triglycerides and genetic predisposition. The unknown factors include high stress levels and high consumption of alcohol. The effect of these factors is not additive, but exponential," says Dr Praveer Agarwal, principal consultant interventional cardiologist, Escorts Heart Institute and Research Centre.

As for the way to go, the first step of knowing exactly where you stand is to get regular health check-ups done. Without measuring your blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol, you will never know whether you have these problems. Only once you know your levels will you be able to know what action needs to be taken. In fact, adults should have regular blood pres-

sure screening, at least once a year. You need more frequent check ups if your blood pressure is more than 120/80 or if you have other risk factors. Says Dr Arvind Lal, chairman, Dr Arvind Parilab: "Lipid profile measures the good cholesterol (HDL), the bad cholesterol (LDL) and the ugly (triglycerides). Adults should have their cholesterol measured at least once every year, and those with family history should start check-ups from 30 years of age. The effort should be to keep LDL below 130 mg/dl, triglycerides below 125 mg/dl and the HDL should not go below 35 mg/dl for a good heart health."

The second step is to quit smoking and the use of tobacco products. Tobacco smoke injures the heart and blood vessels and makes them more vulnerable to build up of blockages. No amount of smoking is safe—even social smoking is dangerous. Women, especially those more than 35 years age, who smoke and take birth control pills, are at a greater risk of having stroke or heart attack. The good news, however, is that once you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease drops dramatically within just one year. And no matter how long or how much you smoked, you'll start reaping rewards as soon as you quit.

The third step is to eat sensibly, exercise regularly and maintain body weight. Says Dr Purshottam Lal, director, intervention cardiologist, Metro Hospitals & Heart Institute: "India is on the top of the cardiac volcano and more women and children are

falling prey to the disease. Apart from poor diet habits and lack of physical activity, Indians also suffer from high stress levels and obesity. The key solution to this is to have a mass sensitisation and screening programmes in schools, colleges and other organisations to identify the high risk groups.

Doctors maintain that regular exercise helps prevent heart disease by increasing blood flow to the heart and strengthening heart's contraction so that it pumps more blood with less effort. It also helps maintain body weight and is a great stress buster. Says Ishi Khosla, clinical nutritionist and director, Wholefood: "You don't need to cut back on your food to keep your heart healthy. It is more about eating right by adding fruits and vegetables to your diet and consuming small amounts of good quality oils. Balance and moderation in food are needed both for prevention and treatment of the disease."

Undeniably, the disease presents a complex interplay of many factors. But early adoption of healthy heart habits will go a long way in delaying the onset, and control, of the disease. The World Heart Day presents yet another opportunity to make a long-term commitment to our heart.

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