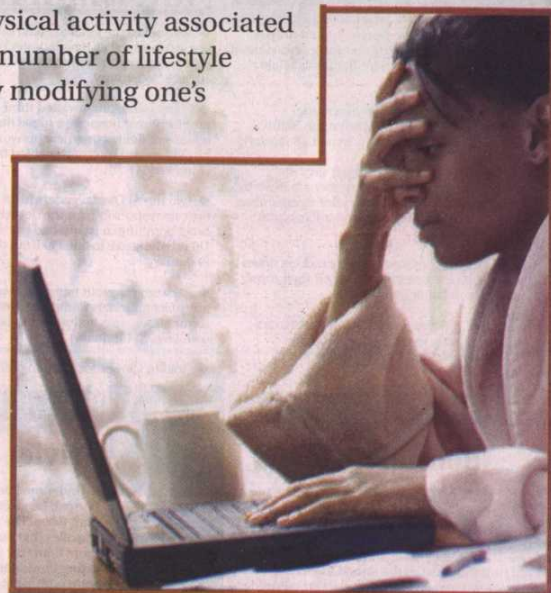


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Stiff competition, stress and absence of physical activity associated with modern day work-life are leading to a number of lifestyle diseases, but these can be easily avoided by modifying one's approach, writes **Rita Joseph**



Lifestyle

KILLERS

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The biggest killer in the world today, accounting for over 80 per cent deaths, is lifestyle factors such as lack of physical activity, obesity, a high-fat diet, stress & tension, alcohol & smoking. These manifest themselves as high blood pressure, diabetes, hyperlipidemia and other ailments, and then without warning, strike fatally as heart attacks (which account for approximately 60 per cent deaths) and cancers (which account for 20 per cent deaths).

Lifestyle diseases (also called diseases of longevity) are on the increase with growing industrialisation. These include stress, anxiety, depression, Alzheimer's disease, substance abuse - smoking & alcoholism - Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, nephritis or chronic renal failure, osteoporosis, stroke, obesity, arthritis, atherosclerosis, cancer, chronic liver diseases, asthma, sinusitis, gastric troubles, eczema and psoriasis.

WHO has projected that by 2020 lifestyle diseases will account for almost three-quarter of all deaths worldwide. Lifestyle ailments will be the major killers in India in the coming decades, according to a study conducted by Confederation of Indian Industries and McKinsey. By 2010, India will have 100 million heart patients, says WHO.

There is no permanent cure for most of these diseases and their palliation requires long-term medication and state-of-the-art surgical procedures, which are very expensive and beyond the reach of the common man, according to Dr Deepti Aggarwal, lifestyle management consultant and homeopath at the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre.

Lifestyle diseases

Cardiovascular:

Renowned cardiac surgeon Dr Naresh Trehan is of the view that sedentary lifestyle increases the risk factors to cardiac diseases with obesity, derangement of certain biochemical metabolites causing dyslipidaemia, hypertension and diabetes. Also the food intake is not balanced, thus increasing the fat deposition increases. With lack of exercise the body is unable to metabolise this. Cardiac exercises especially increases heart rate and cardiac output.

Stress is another important factor and it should be avoided. The body requires complete physical and



mental rest during every 24 hours. Mental stress can be warded off by yoga and meditation. Good sleep for at least 6-8 hours a day gives mental as well as physical rest.

Modern lifestyle stress is also affecting the cardiac health of children and adolescents, said Dr Trehan. It puts pressure on the young generation in terms of performance, due to which they are taking to sedentary habits and faulty dietary habits which lead to cardiac risk factors like obesity, premature hypertension, asthma and even

Healthy dietary habits

- ◆ Have dinner about 2-3 hrs before going to sleep.
- ◆ Eat easily-digestible food especially during dinner.
- ◆ Consume a well-balanced & fibre-rich diet
- ◆ Have a glass of warm milk before dinner as it contains serotonin, a sleep-inducing agent.
- ◆ Make your diet simpler by having more fresh and raw food items. Avoid processed and canned food as they are high in sodium content and are also difficult to digest
- ◆ Alcohol, fatty food, tobacco, tea, caffeine, should be avoided
- ◆ Drink plenty of water as it keeps the body's functions working properly. Also it neutralises excess of acid and washes off the toxins from the system
- ◆ Rest and relax a few minutes before and after each and every meal. Always eat slowly and chew the food very well.

addictions. Fast food containing preservatives cause hypertension and obesity, he added. According to American Public Health Association, coronary heart disease led to 460,000 deaths, while lung cancer claimed 155,000 lives, and diabetes 65,000 deaths worldwide in 1998.

Diabetes:

Stress has a major role in development of diabetes as it

predisposes the body to higher levels of stress hormones and corticosteroids which increases sugar levels in the body.

Junk-food eating and sedentary lifestyle add to the development of the disease. It is mainly the heavy cholesterol diet which predisposes one to early pop-up belly and diabetes, said Dr A P S Suri, diabetic footcare specialist.

Stress:

The reasons for stress are mainly changing family dynamics, occupational environment, longer and more working hours, lots of competition, socio-economic changes and consumerism, said Sameer Parikh, chief of the department of mental health, Max Care. With little or no time to relax and socialise and with social-emotional support lacking in smaller families, problems tend to be suppressed in the individual, he said.

Spine and joints:

Dr HS Chhabra, medical director and chief of spine services, Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, said poor back postures are also posing health hazards. While working on the computer for long hours it is practically impossible to maintain correct back posture. Incorrect posture causes tension in muscles of the back and ligaments of the spine, thereby weakening the spinal joints. This brings on muscular pain, stiffness and causes problems like disc bulging, he added.

Prolonged sitting in one posture also affects the joints, said Dr J

Fitness

- Regular physical exercise releases the muscular tension in the body and relaxes all the muscles. This in turn is conducive for sleep.
- Exercise increases blood supply to different organs, including the brain, which gets a rich supply of oxygen for its nutrition.
- Do not exercise within 3 hours of bedtime.
- Practice yogasanas, pranayama, meditation.
- In case of shift duties, yoga may be beneficial.
- Longer waistline shorter lifeline. Keep your waist below 40 inches (in case of men) and 35 inches (women).
- Standing: While standing for a long time give support to your back (by standing against a wall) or else keep one of your legs higher than the ground level. Do not stoop your shoulders, which will again cause muscular strain.
- Sitting: While sitting do not select a low stool.
- While at work adjust the height of your chair in accordance with the table so as to make your upper arms parallel to your vertebral column and while sitting in front of a computer, adjust your seat so as to make your eyes concentrate on the centre of the computer.
- Take lots of breaks to stretch and relax, both momentary breaks every few minutes and longer breaks of long hours, stretching arms, legs and neck.
- Yogasana like tadasan, kati shakti vikasa, dhanur asana can help in easing pain.
- Back-strengthening exercise e.g. Pilates - rolling down, spine curl always slow, getting up from forward bending to upright position. Do warming up and stretching before any physical activity or sport.
- Exercising more than recommended in the long run will lead to micro injuries.
- Pranayams clear lungs and body of toxins and restores its healthy functioning.
- A good laugh improves your blood circulation. **DR DEEPTI AGGARWAL**



Maheshwari, chief of joint replacement & arthroscopic surgery, Indian Spinal Injury Centre. Physical activity is a big stimulator of bone strength and lack of it is a major cause of joint diseases.

Eye strain:

Long hours on computers causes a lot of stress and strain to eyes, according to Dr Vijay Sabharwal, senior ophthalmologist & director, Shree Jeewan Hospital. He said, "We must remember that human eyes were designed to see distant objects. In the stone-age they were primarily used for hunting or finding food to eat. Today one spends more time indoors, either reading, on computers, or watching TV. For all

these activities one has to use eye muscles to focus on the required distance. This causes eye strain or asthenopia. When we use these eye muscles constantly they contract and get spasms. This leads to eye strain, headache, difficulty in focussing etc. "Sit straight while studying or using the computer, do not read or watch TV lying down. Get into the habit of blinking frequently while reading or using computer, frequently change your focus, trying to focus on a distant object. Lastly exercise your eyes regularly," he said.

Stress management

- ◆ Engage in quiet activities to 'wind down' at the end of the day like reading, watching TV, listening to music, meditation, and prayer
- ◆ Think about a relaxing scene
- ◆ Practice deep muscle-relaxation exercises
- ◆ Practice the self-relaxation technique of focusing intently on a soothing word (like 'calm' or 'relax') or on breathing in & out slowly and deeply
- ◆ Keep your arms and hands warm. Cold muscles and tendons are at much greater risk for overuse injuries, and many offices are over-air-conditioned.
- ◆ Stress occurs when pressure is greater than resource.

Skin problems:

Dr Simal Soin, medical director, A+ Medispa, said skin problems caused by faulty lifestyle could be related to overwork, stress, smoking, late nights, unhealthy eating and constipation. Faulty lifestyle can cause texture-related issues such as dull, lifeless skin, dark circles, pigmentation and acne. Besides these it can cause early wrinkling and sagging jawline.

Sexual activity:

Dr VK Wadia, consultant, psycho-sexual medicine, said stress often

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leads to relationship blues. There cannot be a bigger killer of libido than stress which also affects the arousal or excitability by inhibiting the release of sex hormones.

As against the popular belief that alcohol increases excitement and therefore, enhances sexual performance, the scientific fact is that alcohol is a central nervous system depressant and decreases arousability, he said.

Asked the reason for stress at work, Sunil K Goyal, CEO of Bharti TeleTech Limited, said: "It all depends on how much one enjoys his or her day-to-day work. When one enjoys the challenges at work, with an internal passion, the healthier lifestyle choices are never compromised.

"To be able to contribute every day at work, that too with full passion, energy and a smile, we have to take extra steps for keeping ourselves healthier. There are executives who spend 12 hours every day at work, and rest over phone and Internet. Their minds are constantly engaged with work problems. This corporate lifestyle does not allow us to spend happy moments with family, share those little joys, and invest a little bit of time on healthy living. We can only caution them for timely action.

"For over 20 years I have been doing minimum 15 minutes of daily stretching exercises. I have also increased to 45 minutes my morning walk and stretching exercises. At Bharti enterprises we have regular workshops on meditation and healthy living," he said.

All diseases, especially psychosomatic, will gain greatly from a holistic management, is the view of Dr GG Krishnan, senior consultant, global health, Medicity, Gurgaon. Integrated medicine improves patient compliance to conventional disease management protocols. It relies on the individuals' reaction to the environment and mental perceptions of the same, he said.

Healthcare industry is now focusing more on lifestyle diseases as they are a common problem not only in developed countries but also developing countries like India. To equip healthcare infrastructure for prevention and management of this epidemic, the healthcare industry is focusing more on lifestyle diseases, said Dr Chhabra.

A recent study by a research institute in USA showed that a vegetarian diet, moderate exercise and an hour a day of yoga and meditation can not only prevent heart attacks but also reverse clogging of arteries.

A small change in lifestyle can, in a big way, boost the status of health, said Dr Deepti Aggarwal. Wellness is a continuous process. It is an active, lifelong process of becoming aware of choices, and making decisions toward a more balanced and fulfilling life, she said. To have the fullest benefit, lifestyle management should be holistic in its approach and it should touch the social, occupational, physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of life, she said, adding it's never too late for a healthy start. Lifestyle management is a continuous process towards health. Even if one starts late, one can definitely prevent the developing risk factors.