

BRUNCH



Under pressure

You don't have to be stressed to have high BP. Check yourself now

by Venu Singh

MARKETING EXECUTIVE Vinay Jain (35) was the envy of his stressed out friends and colleagues who envied him for his ability to handle pressure without breaking into the slightest sweat. But one morning Vinay woke up with severe chest pain. He was taken to hospital where he was told he had suffered a mild heart attack caused by high blood pressure (BP).

Vinay was flummoxed. How could he suffer from high BP? He was young and energetic and not stressed out in the least.

That's when the doctor shed light on a common myth. "It is a complete myth to say that only people with high stress levels are prone to high BP. Even a very cool and calm person could easily suffer from it," says Dr H K Chopra, senior consultant cardiologist at Moolchand Medicity Hospital, Delhi.

He adds that since there are no tell-tale signs for high BP, also known as hypertension, it is not easy to detect the condition and in most cases it is usually diagnosed very late. "This is why hypertension is known as a silent killer that affects your heart, kidney, brain and eyes too," adds Dr Chopra.

So what is blood pressure and when does it become a problem?

In simple terms, blood pressure is the pressure of the blood against the walls of the arteries. It results from two forces. The first is created by the heart as it pumps blood into the arteries and through the circulatory system and the second is the force of the arteries as they resist the flow of blood. The higher number (systolic) represents the pressure while the heart contracts to pump blood to the body. The lower number (diastolic) represents the pressure when the heart relaxes between beats.

"While 120/80 or slightly lower than that is considered normal, anything above 120/80 needs to be monitored. If your BP is over 140/90, you definitely need to be cautious and have to make lifestyle modifications to take care of it," explains Dr Sandeep Budhiraja, head, internal

medicine, Max Healthcare, Delhi.

There is no permanent cure for the condition. "Regular health checkups after the age of 25 are essential because you can keep an eye on your BP which you can then control with diet and lifestyle modifications. But if these modifications don't help you, it's best to be on regular medication to avoid serious damage to your vital organs," says Dr C V Vanjani, consultant cardiologist, Hinduja Hospital, Mumbai.

Here are a few simple ways to prevent and or/ manage hypertension.

HEALTHY EATING

- Reduce consumption of foods containing cholesterol, sugar and fat. Sugar results in easy weight gain, a major cause of high BP.
- It is also important to reduce your intake of salt. Aim for less than 1 teaspoon of salt (1500 mg of sodium) a day. If you suffer from high BP, have even less. Avoid junk and processed foods that contain a lot of salt. Avoid pickle, *papad*, soya sauce, tomato sauce and potato chips that are all high in salt.

■ Eat more fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy foods and foods rich in potassium like bananas, potatoes, citrus fruits, wheat grass and barley grass.

MAINTAIN HEALTHY WEIGHT

- Being overweight increases your risk of developing high BP, heart disease, diabetes, and high cholesterol. Losing weight can help you lower your blood pressure.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Increasing levels of physical exercise can help control or prevent high BP as it helps you manage your weight. Start at a rate you are comfortable with and be regular. Pranayam, especially *bhambri pranayam*, is considered to be very helpful in managing BP.

LIMIT ALCOHOL AND DON'T SMOKE

- Excessive alcohol can increase BP and harm the liver, brain, and heart. Smoking injures blood vessel walls and speeds up the hardening of arteries.

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LOW BP

Hypotension is the medical term for low BP (less than 90/60 with no symptoms).

In healthy people, especially athletes, it is a sign of good cardiovascular health. But in elders, low BP could be a sign of an underlying problem where it may cause inadequate blood flow to vital organs.

HYPERTENSION IS KNOWN AS A SILENT KILLER THAT AFFECTS YOUR VITAL ORGANS