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49.1 per cent of Indians in high heart attack risk zone

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THE HINDU Its a good time to reconsider one's lifestyle ahead of the World Heart Day.

It is that time of the year when you listen to your heart, quite literally. World Heart Day, falling on the last Sunday of September every year, is only a reminder to do the above. World Heart Day, the World Heart Federation tells us, was created to inform people around the globe that heart disease and stroke are the world's leading cause of death, claiming 17.2 million lives each year.

This year's theme "Work with Heart" is specifically built around the workplace. The WHF, the World Health Organization and the World Economic Forum have joined forces to call on governments, employers and workers around the world to make workplaces healthier. Workplace wellness programmes that encourage healthy diets, physical activity and restrictions on tobacco use have been shown to be a cost-effective way to save lives and improve productivity.

A study conducted among over 8,000 people across the country, conducted by SaffolaLife in 2008, has shown that Indians' lipid profiles puts us at higher risk of heart ailments compared to other age groups. Lipids are important dietary constituents, because of their high energy value and the vitamins and essential fatty acids associated with them. The study details the LDL, HDL and TGL of these people.

Initial results showed that 49.1 per cent of Indians have poor lipid profile, thereby increasing the chances for heart attacks. What is worrying still is the study's contention that the majority of young men in the age group 30-39 years show abnormalities in their lipid profiles. Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu top the risk list by having all three indicators (LDL, TGL and HDL) above acceptable levels.

It also held that 20 per cent of women are at risk after they cross 40 years, linking it with menopause and the consequent decrease in estrogen. "Most women know that they are naturally protected by estrogen. However, very few are aware that with high levels of stress, or diabetes, even estrogen is no protection," V. Chockalingam, senior cardiologist, says.

He adds that the ideal total cholesterol level must be less than 200 mg, LDL at less than 100 mg, HDL at over 50 mg and TGL under 150 mg. However, if you do not yet have the perfect levels, there is hope. Dr. Chockalingam says the situation can be remedied by altering food habits, taking up exercise, and having a healthy mind set.

Clearly coronary disease is on the rise, says S. Visvakumar, cardio thoracic surgeon, Government General Hospital. "When I joined the government service several years ago, we were seeing more of rheumatic heart disease. Now it is Ischemic Heart Disease, thanks to alterations in lifestyles cutting across economic groups," he says.

Also the disease is occurring much earlier than it used to, he adds. He talks of how he had to operate on girls as young as 22 years and of how a first year medical student died recently of a heart attack. "If youngsters come with abnormal lipid levels and they have a family history of heart problems, then we prefer to treat them aggressively early on," he explains. Diet modifications and a rigorous exercise schedule are also prescribed.

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