

US INDIAN NEWS

Indian Women Equally at Risk for Heart Attacks

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The South Asian Heart Center in Mountain View, Calif., will host its first fundraising gala Mar. 14 at the India Community Center in Milpitas, Calif.

SAHC, housed at El Camino Hospital, is the first non-profit organization dedicated to the prevention of heart disease in South Asians, who tend to suffer from cardiovascular disease at a rate four times higher than the population at large.



By the year 2010, 60 percent of the world's heart disease sufferers will be of Indian origin, predicts SAHC.

The black-tie gala, called "Scarlet Night: An Affair of the Heart," will feature a fashion show, along with local musicians and dance troupes. The organization expects more than 400 attendees at its premiere gala.

February is American Heart Month, a national initiative aimed at highlighting the nation's number one killer. The American Heart Association has launched its "Go Red for Women" during the month to inform women about their risks for heart disease, usually thought of as an exclusively male ailment.

Ashish Mathur, executive director of SAHC, told India-West that South Asian women have a lack of awareness about their own risk for heart disease. The Center has conducted a two-year survey, collecting data from more than 1800 people and found what Mathur termed "a surprising amount of risk" in the San Francisco Bay Area South Asian population.

Of the 558 women surveyed, 67 percent had two or more risk factors for heart disease. More than half of the women surveyed had dyslipidemia, an excess of lipids in the blood.

Twenty-one percent of the women surveyed had hypertension, and nearly a quarter were pre-diabetic or had full-blown diabetes, with a large number of previously undiagnosed cases, said Mathur.

Over 50 percent of the women surveyed had waist circumferences higher than 32 inches, a huge indicator of heart disease for South Asian women,



said Mathur, adding that abdominal obesity and a BMI higher than 23 are also good indicators of heart disease.

The cutoffs for South Asian women are a little more stringent than in the population-at-large, noted Mathur.

Women and men experience heart attacks differently, noted Mathur, adding that women often don't know they are having a heart attack.

Men experiencing a heart attack may feel chest pain and upper body discomfort, along with shortness of breath. Women also experience breathlessness — sometimes exercise-induced — but will feel back pain and indigestion, symptoms not usually associated with a heart attack.

SAHC advises South Asian women, even younger ones, to get screened to determine their own risk for cardiovascular disease. The Center then provides individual plans for women, based on the results of their screenings, which include a questionnaire to determine family history and personal risk assessments; a blood draw; and physical measurements.

Generally, Mathur recommends reading all nutritional labels to determine saturated fat content in food, and switching from grains — especially white ones — to vegetables and fruits.

Exercise is also important, Mathur told India-West, noting that it is very difficult to get South Asian women to exercise. Walking — especially in pairs — is one of the most effective exercises, he said, adding that women should walk every day at a pace at which talking seems slightly difficult.

The American Heart Association recommends taking up a hobby — such as dancing or bicycling — to reduce stress, quitting smoking, and choosing baked foods over fried ones.

The AHA's Web site for the campaign is www.goredforwomen.org. SAHC's Web site is www.southasianheartcenter.org.