

## **CARE OF YOUR HEART**

### **THE HOLISTIC APPROACH**

It would be correct to say that if you care your heart, heart will care you. From poets to philosophers and from preachers to practitioners of health care, every one has attached great importance to the thing called heart in human system. It is well known to all that even in machines like a refrigerator or an air-conditioner, the most important part is compressor which is often described as the heart of the machine. Some important questions relating to the heart such as (i) Is our heart really the master of our body (ii) Can it function entirely on its own (iii) In diseases affecting the heart, is heart the trigger or the target of hostilities occurring elsewhere (iv) Should our attempts to protect the heart be focussed at the heart or somewhere else. etc. always arise. These questions are of great importance in view of the increasing occurrence of heart problems and for the proper utilization of our limited resources to control the cardiovascular diseases.

It would not be out of place to mention here that in most of the industrialised countries like USA, U. K., India 60 to 70% of all deaths are caused due to heart diseases, and high blood pressure. A brief study shows that in the Cardiac clinics of the All India Medical Sciences about 9000 to 10,000 new cardiac patients are registered every year.

Before proceeding further into the matter, it is important to describe here the relevant points, like what is a heart attack, its causes and the warning signals etc.

Heart attack is a lay man's term for coronary occlusion, thrombosis or myocardial infarction in medical terms. Heart attack occurs when the blood vessel (Coronary artery) which supply fresh blood to the heart

is suddenly blocked off and discontinue the blood supply to a part of the heart muscle.

The main cause of heart attack is atherosclerosis where-in fat (cholesterol) is deposited on the inner lining of the coronary artery. The gradual accumulation of the fat may ultimately compromise the lumen sufficiently enough to interfere with blood flow. When the blood flow ceases suddenly due to obstruction, the result is a heart attack.

As in other diseases, heart attack also, gives warnings like uncomfortable pressure pain, fullness or burning sensation in the centre of the chest for several minutes or longer, generally at rest. It may be short, lasting or persist for hours. Not only these but discomfort and pain may spread to the shoulders, arms, jaw and sometimes to the upper part of the abdomen.

Severe pain, dizziness, fainting, vomiting, sweating or shortness of breath may accompany the above feelings. These may sometimes be the only sensations without any significant chest symptoms. It may be noted that the symptoms or warnings may not always be present or severe. In many instances they may subside to return to normal after sometime. The warnings or signals are not the same for every one as they may vary from very intense for one to mild symptoms for another.

The heart disease is not one but are of various types and these are (1) Congenital (2) Rheumatic (3) Coronary (Heart attacks and angina) (4) Hypertensive Heart Disease (5) Arrhythmias (Pulse rhythm abnormalities) (6) Infections of heart and pericardium and lastly Cardiomyopathies (Heart Muscle disease). Amongst these, Rheumatic heart disease is the commonest and is followed by coronary

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disease, high blood pressure and congenital heart disease in the rate of prevalence. In western countries rheumatic heart disease is not in existence but they have to deal with the coronary heart disease and high blood pressure. In India rheumatic heart disease, the epidemic of coronary disease (heart attack) and hypertension are in existence. In a big city like Bombay 20 to 30% of adult population is suffering from high blood pressure and heart attacks. They are now also striking youngsters in their forties.

It is worthwhile to mention that these diseases are more prevalent in highly industrialised societies, smokers, obese people and those with sedentary jobs, subjects with high blood lipids (cholesterol etc), diabetes patients and high level of uric acid in blood, persons with tense personality and in jobs involving highly responsible positions. However, there are other rare cases who do not have either of these risk factors and yet they suffer heart attacks.

Now the question comes as to how to take care of these. Although heart is the most vital organ supplying nourishment through blood circulation to all parts of our body, it is very sensitive to stimuli from the rest of the body or even outside the body. Of special importance are the emotions and diet. Hence to take care of the heart in the most effective way we have to take care of all those factors which may have direct or indirect influence on the functioning of heart.

The concept of heart care that I call as the holistic approach means that the net effect of various efforts directed to achieve something is more than the mere mathematical total. Although heart is just one of the many organs of the body, and it is in the interest of the heart itself that we have a concept of whole body care which will include the heart care. In fact health is a state of physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. In spite of the fact that living conditions are going up, the heart attacks and high blood pressure (hypertension) are occurring more frequently especially in the younger persons. It is very important to know the reasons as to why this epidemic

of heart disease is spreading alongwith the economic prosperity and industrialisation. The answer obviously is the change of life style, excessive smoking, high cholesterol diet, physical inactivity, use of contraceptive pills specially accompanied by smoking habit and tension and worries which increase the risk of a person having heart attack.

As we all know, emotions have a strong control over the functioning of heart and various cardiac arrhythmias have been reported to occur by creating emotional disturbances. Since these emotional disturbances are being increased day by day and this phenomenon has been seen in the human populations when they particularly migrate from isolated islands to the main lands, it has compelled us to think over as to what could be the effective approach to contain the increasing incidence of coronary heart disease. The drugs have certainly not helped us to lower down the chances of people getting heart attacks. If we go through the condition of some advanced countries like European countries, we will find that there has been a reduction in heart attack by 30 to 35% but not because of drugs but because of Institutions of large scale measures like (i) avoiding smoking (ii) changing of food habit and adopting vegetarian diet more than non-vegetarian as well as to avoid high cholesterol foods (iii) doing more physical exercise, yoga and meditation. It has been proved beyond doubt that using drugs to reduce heart disease for long have not only yielded any positive results but on the other hand it created serious side effects. The World Health Organisation has recommended the following preventions to control High Blood Pressure:-

- i) Restrict salt intake and avoid adding extra salt into dishes.
- ii) Control of weight in obese persons
- iii) Avoid excess use of alcohol.
- iv) Regular physical exercise.
- v) Modification of environmental and psychosocial factors.
- iv) Relaxation techniques like Yoga and meditation.

It is, thus, seen that incorporating these in routine and proper control over (a) Emotions