

WORLD HEART DAY 2008

Know your risk for heart disease

DR SMMUSTAFA ZAMAN

World Heart Day is an international campaign by World Heart Federation against heart disease and stroke which is going to be observed tomorrow. This annual campaign aims at increasing public awareness of growing threat of heart disease and stroke.

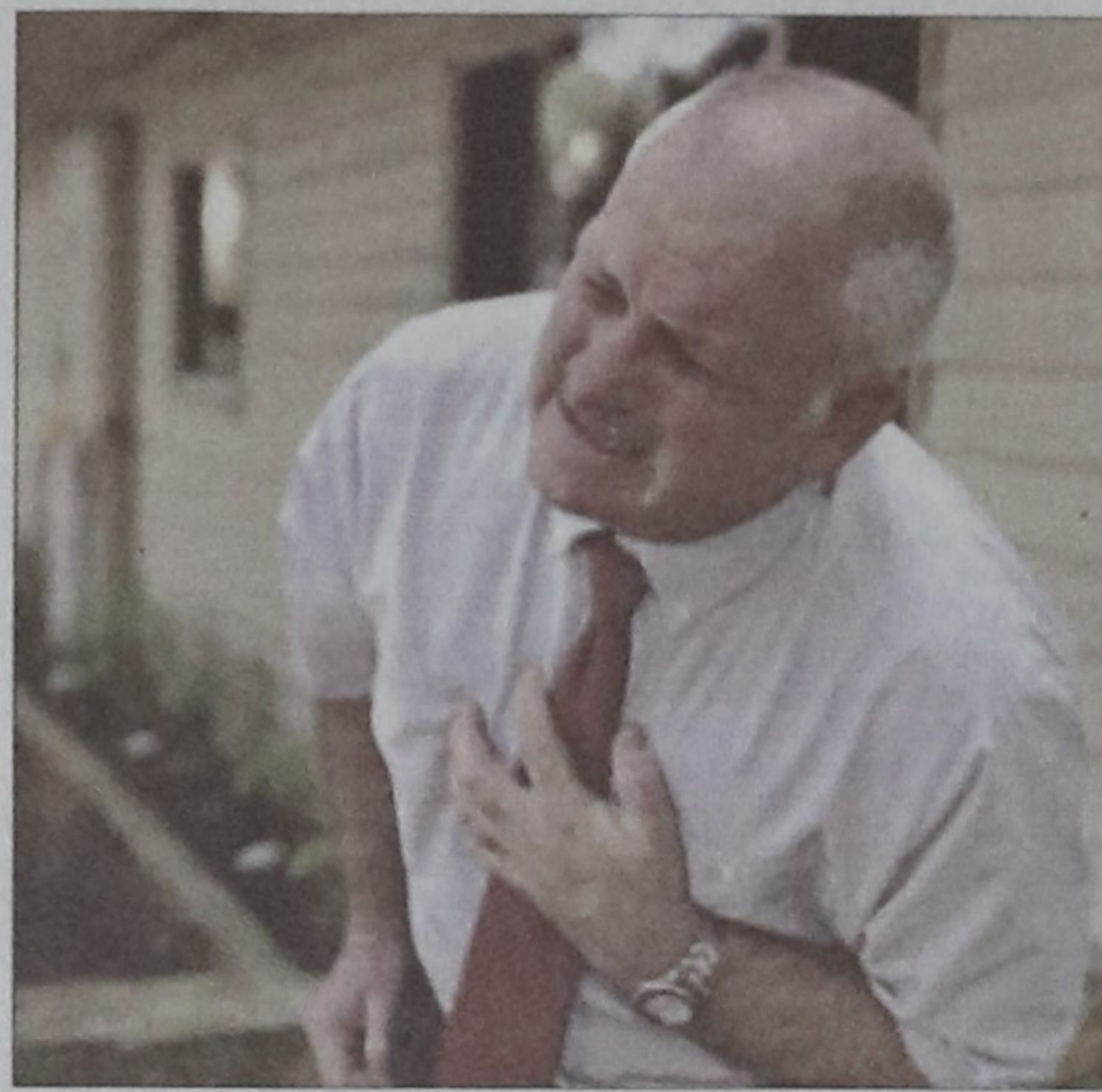
Globally, cardiovascular diseases (heart diseases) are the number one cause of death and projected to remain so. Heart disease and stroke cause 17.5 million deaths each year, as many deaths as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and diabetes plus all forms of cancer and chronic respiratory disease combined. Eighty per cent of the victims are from low- and middle-income countries like Bangladesh although it is largely preventable. With simple and affordable steps we can reduce the major risk factors which hasten the heart disease to develop.

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) include coronary heart disease (heart attacks), cerebrovascular disease (stroke), raised blood pressure (hypertension), peripheral artery disease, rheumatic heart disease, congenital heart disease and heart failure. The major causes of cardiovascular disease are tobacco use, physical inactivity,

and unhealthy diet. Other factors include high cholesterol level, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, stress, obesity, family history of heart disease.

Controlling the risk factors helps the heart to age more slowly and dramatically reduces the risk of heart disease. The message of World Heart Day is a positive one and emphasises the importance of a heart-healthy lifestyle to leading a better, longer life. Each year World Heart Day focuses on a specific theme. This year's campaign encourages people to *Know Your Risk!* and to find out what they can do to reduce it.

Heart attacks and strokes are mainly caused by a blockage that prevents blood from flowing to the heart or the brain. The most common cause is a build-up of fatty deposits on the inner walls of the blood vessels that supply the heart or brain. The blood vessels become narrower and less flexible, also known as atherosclerosis (or hardening of the arteries). The blood vessels are then more likely to become blocked by blood clots. When this happens, the blocked vessels cannot supply blood to the heart and brain, which then becomes damaged. An early form of fatty deposits, known as fatty streaks, can even be found in some children younger than 10 years. These deposits get slowly worse



as the person gets older. So it is never too early and never too late to start taking care of your heart.

The level of risk for heart disease and stroke is a combination of modifiable and non-modifiable factors. Among them high blood pressure is one of the most important factors. There are usually no obvious signs of high blood pressure but the good news is that it is easy for health-

care professionals to detect and usually controllable with lifestyle changes and/or medication.

Many of us are unaware of the risk factors and whether our own lifestyle and family history could be contributing to our risk of developing heart diseases and stroke. By finding out your level of risk you are taking a simple but significant step towards preventing your life being affected by

hypertension. If you know your blood pressure, in particular, your blood cholesterol and your blood sugar levels combined with your height, weight and waist measurement, your health-care professional will be able to advise you what specific actions should be taken to reduce your risk of suffering from heart disease or stroke. So you can have a heart for life.

Heart diseases and stroke can be better prevented by regular exercise, avoiding tobacco use and second-hand tobacco smoke and a healthier diet—low in salt and fat and rich in fibres, fresh vegetables, fruit and maintaining a healthy body weight.

Studies have shown that increased consumption of fruit and vegetables from less than three to more than five servings a day is related to a 17 per cent reduction in coronary heart disease. Regular light exercise like walking for a particular period (say 30-45 minutes) can reduce the risk to a significant level. High blood pressure in particular is closely related to excessive consumption of salty foods.

Comprehensive action requires combining approaches that seek to reduce the risks throughout the entire population with strategies that target individuals at high risk or with established disease. Examples of

population-wide interventions that can be implemented to reduce CVDs include: comprehensive tobacco control policies, taxation to reduce the intake of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, building walking and cycle ways to increase physical activity.

Effective and inexpensive medication is available to treat nearly all CVDs. For an example, after a heart attack or stroke, the risk of a recurrence or death can be substantially lowered with a combination of drugs—statins to lower cholesterol, drugs to lower blood pressure, and aspirin.

Operations used to treat CVDs include coronary artery bypass, balloon angioplasty (where a small balloon-like device is threaded through an artery to open the blockage), valve repair and replacement should be more accessible for all sections of population through a nationwide planning.

There is a need for increased government investment through national programmes aimed at prevention and control of CVDs. Integrated approaches should be taken which will focus on the main common risk factors for CVD. By adopting these, the picture really can change for the better.

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HAVE A NICE DAY
Dr RUBAIUL MURSHED

All health information to keep you up to date

Does air conditioning affect your health?

The term air conditioning refers to the cooling and dehumidification of indoor air for thermal comfort in buildings and motor vehicles. We usually call them A/C or aircon that keep us calm and cool. Aside from added comfort, air conditioners may cause several health hazards. In fact, the problems associated with air conditioners arise out of overuse.

Air conditioning exaggerates the effects of arthritis and neuritis. It also causes problem for those with sinus trouble, causing their heads to become blocked. In addition to these obvious reactions to an air conditioned environment there are many far more delicate reactions that can adversely affect a person's health.

Studies between those who have worked for prolonged periods in air conditioned offices and those who work outdoors have shown that the people exposed to air conditioning are more prone to colds, flu and other minor ailments. It has also been seen that the body undergoes a certain amount of stress when it is forced to go from a very hot environment into an air conditioned one; eventually this can cause problems.

It is also clear that those who spend too much time in an air conditioned situation are not able to readily cope with hot temperatures. Indeed many people have been made unwell by extreme variances between

outside and inside temperatures.

Air conditioners in cars also have some problems. According to a researcher (American Automobile Safety Organisation), extended exposure to car air conditioner may cause drowsiness and not being able to concentrate on driving.

Micro-organisms have been found within the units that may cause breathing problems. Researchers at Louisiana State Medical Center identified eight different types of mould living inside of 22 of 25 cars tested.

Air conditioning units can also circulate air-borne diseases, most commonly Legionnaire's Disease. If the unit has cheap filters or is not properly maintained it will simply recirculate pollutants.

However, spending just a few hours a day in an air-conditioned room is not harmful for one's health. But, if air conditioners are not well maintained, they can cause some of the very problems. A dirty air filter can harbor pollen, fungi and bacteria and allow millions of microorganisms into the room, possibly triggering an asthma attack, irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat—even flu like illness. Proper maintenance will minimise these risks. It is better to vacuum the air filter every two to four weeks and then wash it in soapy water. Be sure to let the filter dry completely before reinstalling it.

Sleep position: What's best for your back?



To prevent back pain, sleep curled on your side, with your knees bent up toward your chest. To help keep your spine aligned properly, you may want to place a small pillow between your knees. Lying flat on your back or stomach may contribute to back pain by arching your spine beyond its normal curve.

Acupuncture beats drug to treat hot flashes

REUTERS, Washington

Acupuncture works as well as a drug commonly used to combat hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms that can accompany breast cancer treatment, and its benefits last longer, without bad side effects, researchers expressed recently.

They tested acupuncture, which began in China more than 2,000 years ago and involves inserting needles into the body, against the Wyeth antidepressant Effexor, one of a class of antidepressants is one of the most commonly used drugs to treat hot flashes in these women for hot flashes in breast cancer patients.

Acupuncture was just as effective as drug in managing symptoms including hot flashes and night sweats, according to

researchers led by Dr. Eleanor Walker of Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit.

After 12 weeks of treatment, symptoms were reduced for 15 additional weeks for women who had undergone acupuncture, compared with two weeks for those who had taken Effexor, Walker said.

"It was a more durable effect," Walker, whose findings were presented at an American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology meeting. There were no bad side effects with acupuncture, and women reported increased energy, overall sense of well-being and sexual desire, the researchers said.

Those taking drug Effexor reported side effects including nausea, headache, difficulty sleeping, dizziness, increased

blood pressure, fatigue and anxiety.

"It has been tested directly against a drug that we use regularly. And it is more effective. It has benefits, as opposed to any side-effects," Walker pointed out.

"If you only have to give women treatment three to four times a year as opposed to having to take a pill every day, that is going to be more cost-effective for the patient," Walker added.

Breast cancer patients can develop menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes after treatment with chemotherapy and anti-estrogen hormones. Hormone replacement therapy is often used to treat such symptoms in women without breast cancer, but breast cancer patients cannot use that therapy because it may raise the risk of the cancer's return.

Lowering cholesterol with therapeutic lifestyle changes

STAR HEALTH DESK

If you are one of those craving to lower your cholesterol level with the help of only drugs, but avoiding various lifestyle changes like a physical exercise, a better diet and weight loss, you may be heading for the wrong side of the fence or very soon waking up on the wrong side of the bed.

Experts pointed out fatty diet, overweight, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption and some heritable factors are responsible for high cholesterol level in our blood.

Although medication can bring cholesterol levels down, high cholesterol should be prevented through Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) that includes diet management and an active lifestyle. So do not jump to medicines right away to lower cholesterol and instead make some changes in your life and get daily exercise. TLC is a set of things you can do to help lower your LDL cholesterol. The main parts of TLC are:

The TLC diet

As most of our body's cholesterol is made in liver and the rest

comes from our diet, it becomes vital to lower the amount of fat and cholesterol in our diet. Be mindful about limiting saturated fat (fat in meat and whole-fat dairy products) and Trans fat (fat found in many commercial foods and in deep-fried fast foods).

We should take foods low in saturated fat which include: Fat-free or 1 percent dairy products, lean meats, fish, skinless poultry, whole grain foods, fruits and vegetables. Also limit some kinds of food high in cholesterol such as liver and other organ meats, egg yolks, and full-fat dairy products. Fibre rich diet is beneficial in this regard. Good sources of soluble fiber include oats, certain fruits (such as oranges and pears) and vegetables (such as carrots), and dried peas and beans.

Fibre is helpful, so try to include foods like whole-grain bread and breakfast cereals such as oats, and a variety of fruit and vegetables. Of late, oats has received thumbs up from doctors across the world for the sponge effect it provides to absorb fat rich cholesterol from the system and aiding digestion.

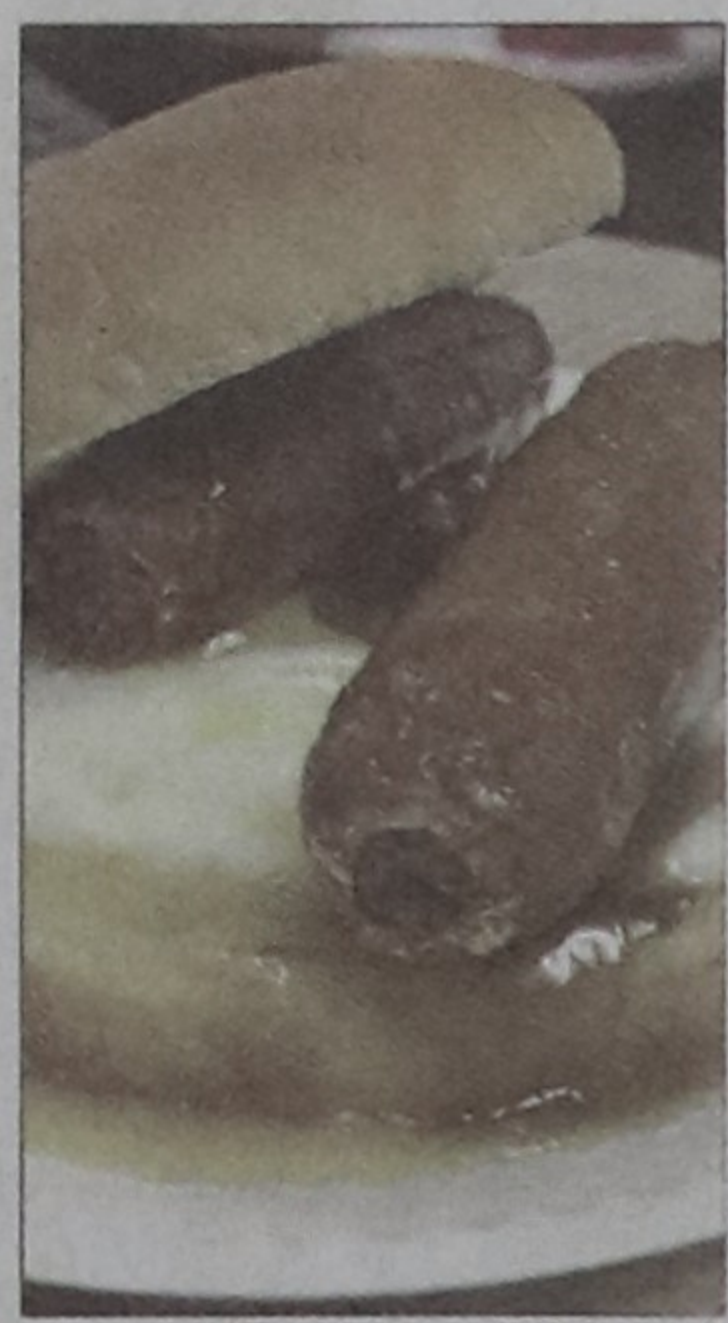
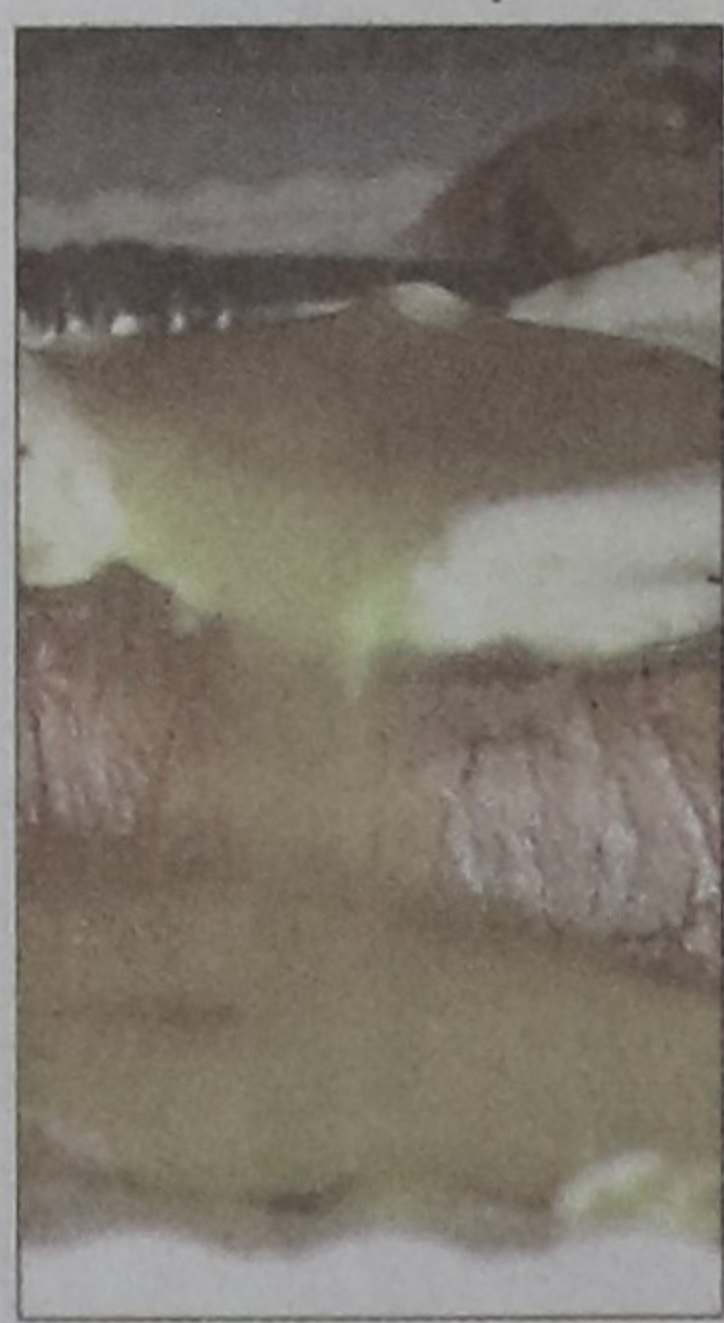
Weight management

Losing weight if you are overweight can help lower LDL, the bad cholesterol and is especially important for those with a cluster of risk factors that includes high triglyceride (TG) in blood and/or low HDL levels and being overweight with a large waist measurement.

Physical activity

Regular physical activity (30 minutes) is recommended for everyone. It can help raise the good cholesterol or HDL and lower LDL and is especially important for those with high triglyceride and/or low HDL levels who are overweight with a large waist measurement. Try taking the stairs, walking to the shops or going to the gym, which helps your heart stay healthy.

For those who are motivated to reduce their too-high cholesterol levels, there is always a treatment trade-off to be made, when it comes to choosing a healthy long life nothing beats patience and the right lifestyle and the right time for heart check ups irrespective of your young age.



DID YOU KNOW?

Obesity may diminish a man's fertility

Being obese may dim a man's chances of becoming a father, even if he is otherwise healthy, a new study suggests.

Researchers found that among 87 healthy men ages 19 to 48, those who were obese were less likely to have ever fathered a child. More importantly, they showed hormonal differences that point to a reduced reproductive capacity, the researchers report in the journal *Fertility and Sterility*.

Compared with their thinner counterparts, obese men had lower levels of testosterone in their blood, as well as lower levels of luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH)—both essential to reproduction.

According to the researchers, these relatively low levels of LH and FSH gives rise to a condition called partial hypogonadotropic hypogonadism. This is a condition in which the testes do not function properly due to signaling problems in the hypothalamus or pituitary gland, two brain structures involved in hormone secretion.

The findings suggest that obesity alone is an infertility factor in otherwise healthy men, write Dr. Eric M. Pauli and his colleagues at the Pennsylvania State University

College of Medicine in Hershey.

Of the 87 men in the study, 68 percent had had a child. Pauli's team found that the average body mass index, or BMI, was lower among these men compared with those who had never fathered a child; in the former group, the average BMI was 28, which falls into the range for overweight, while the average BMI for childless men was nearly 32, which falls into the obese range.

When the researchers assessed the men for several reproductive hormones, they found that the more obese a man was, the lower was his LH and FSH levels. On the other hand, increasing obesity correlated with increasing estrogen levels.

Excess body fat, Pauli's team explains, may increase the conversion of testosterone to estrogen in a man's blood. Such hormone alterations could, in turn, signal the brain to suppress FSH and LH production.

Past studies have linked obesity with a dampened libido and increased risk of erectile dysfunction, the researchers note. Those effects, they say, along with the hormonal alterations seen in this study, could act together to decrease an obese man's fertility.

Source: *Fertility and Sterility*

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