

“The exact number of people with cardiovascular diseases in Bangladesh is still unknown”

In conversation with Prof. Dr. Md. Atahar Ali, Associate Professor, Cardiology, NICVD

To live life to its fullest extent, you need to keep yourself healthy and, most importantly, keep the heart beating at its own healthy pace. With the increasing use of technology, our physical activity has decreased, resulting in an increase in cardiac diseases; this is the trend all over the world. Most people are unaware about the right kinds of activities needed to maintain a healthy heart for a healthy life.

In light of this, Prof. Dr. Md.

published in India and work upon those assumptions. We don't have our own data because it is expensive to collect it." Dr. Atahar further shared that Ischemic heart disease (commonly known as artery block) is one of the worst kinds of heart disease; on average, ten out of a thousand suffer from Ischemic Heart Disease, which is a huge figure. The increasing number of cardiac hospitals in the country is a testament to the increasing number of people suffering from heart disease.

According to Dr. Atahar, every year, a minimum of five to seven lakh people suffer from heart failure, among which half a lakh people die. He also emphasised that though we don't hear of congenital heart disease much, around three to four percent of babies born don't have healthy hearts.

He further mentions that it is a relief that the number of people suffering from rheumatic fever is decreasing over time, though around 7.5 percent of the patients admitted in NICVD suffer from rheumatic heart disease.

Regarding non-communicable diseases (NCD), Dr. Atahar shares, "The biggest link between NCD and heart is diabetes. 60 percent of cardiac patients suffer from diabetes. Other than diabetes, there are also hypertension and asthma that have direct effects on the heart. The brighter side here is that diagnosis for these non-communicable heart diseases is getting better in our country. Both private hospitals and government hospitals have improved their services in this sector."

Over the last 15 years, medical facilities in Bangladesh have improved significantly and going abroad for treatment is not a necessity anymore. The government has played a big role by sending more doctors abroad for receiving proper training. Dr. Atahar himself has also been one of the beneficiaries of this programme.



Dr Atahar Ali

Atahar Ali, Professor of Cardiology & Head of Arrhythmia Services Department, National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), shares that the main categories of heart disease include valvular heart disease, congenital heart disease (by birth), coronary artery disease (heart attack, heart block), arrhythmia (electric impulses of the heart), and cardiomyopathy (disease of the heart muscle). For some of these heart conditions, medication is enough whilst for others, surgery is mandatory.

When asked to give an overview of cardiac disease in Bangladesh, Dr. Atahar said, "Till date, the exact number of people with cardiovascular diseases in Bangladesh is unknown. Usually, we assume that the data results would be similar to those

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Institutes like BSMMU have adequate facilities for research on NCD. However, he emphasises that we still have a long way to go and for that, the government and the private sector need to collaborate in a stronger manner.

Regarding scope for improvement, he points out that proper treatment facilities are required for treating congenital heart diseases. Also, more doctors are needed in government hospitals, especially in the rural areas.

Because of people's lifestyle, the risk of heart disease has certainly increased, the top-most reasons being tension, anxiety and smoking. Pressure and diabetes also add to them, he informs.

On a positive note, Dr. Atahar shares that people nowadays are more health conscious. Also, the reliance on doctors and health facilities has gone up in

general in the country. Some can afford to have regular health check-ups while others try to make sure that they lead an appropriate lifestyle depending on the disease they have.

Dr. Atahar suggests that people should be more health conscious, and cooperate with the doctors so that they can do their job properly. Besides, due to certain political factors, some of the foreign medicine companies are being forced to leave the country. In the short run, this may seem positive since it provides scope for the local companies to grow, but there is no denying that we are not yet qualified enough to produce medicine as per international requirements.

The interview was taken by Maureen N. Cymn

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Some heart patients that consult me avoid taking milk in their diet, but it is important to have skimmed milk. I advise my patients to avoid heavy snacks in the evening." Other than fatty foods, a check-up of your daily food intake is necessary too. Too much sugar, oily foods, sodas, red meat and more cause you to be at risk of heart diseases.

Dr Lutfor Rahman, Chief Cardiac Surgeon of Labaid Hospital, says: "Food quality should be of utmost importance. If we look for good quality oil for our cars, why not our heart? People need to give up the trend of 'too much oil, too much salt, too much sugar.'"

even if you are travelling for too long, attending long seminars, or doing something as simple as attending long meetings, it may cause problems too. Nothing to be afraid of though! Dr Lutfor Rahman suggests, "Inertia is not a good state. Moving around in the office, taking short walks away from your desk, eating away from your workspace are good ways to keep yourself in a balance."

ENOUGH SLEEP – YOU

NEED ENOUGH SLEEP
Sleep is an underrated topic. Sleeping keeps you happy, keeps you healthy! As we all know, lack of sleep can affect your immune system, leading to stress, depression, high blood pressure,

DOES THE MODERN LIFESTYLE HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH MY HEART?

Our lifestyles have evolved drastically with time. Our noodles are instant, our food is processed, our calls are now texts over messaging apps like WhatsApp. The digital world is all-pervasive.

What we fail to notice a lot of the time is that our lifestyle has a very big impact on the chances of us being at risk of heart disease. Our family, environment, friends, work and lifestyle have a lot to do with our health.

46-year-old Imran says he stays quite busy with his work. Busy enough to not be able to give his daughter, Ameena, 12, and his wife, Shaila, 42, enough time. On weekends, Imran likes to spend time with his family by trying new restaurants around Dhaka. His wife, Shaila, says she's concerned about Ameena's health. The doctor says Ameena is overweight for her age and may be prone to heart diseases due to her increasing level of cholesterol.

On asking the reason, Shaila mentions that both Imran and Ameena love red meat for dinner and so almost three days out of seven they dine with red meat cooked at home and the weekend calls for restaurants!

She mentions, "My parents were never worried about such an alarming issue when I was young. We always opted for home food rather than restaurants as there weren't many restaurants before unlike now and the ones that we went to were quite expensive and so we seldom ate outside." She adds, "Ameena lacks access to proper and safe playgrounds, due to which we prefer taking her out to restaurants. We had the option of going out and enjoying ourselves but restaurants were never our first priority."

"I recently get many young patients due to increasing awareness through social media. This is a good thing. I would suggest teachers enforce this matter to students, so they are aware of diseases beforehand" says Dr Lutfor Rahman

"Evening walks are much better than morning walks, therefore I suggest my patients walk in the evening to maintain a healthy lifestyle." Qamrun Ahmed says.

So now, ask yourself is your lifestyle healthy for your dear heart?

obesity and more. Lack of sleep is also a very strong determinant of cardiovascular diseases (CVD). To those who sleep less than six hours at night, chances are you are at risk of heart disease.

PASSIVE SMOKING

If you are worried about putting yourself at risk of heart disease by smoking, you are probably putting others at peril too.

Enough with "smoking causes heart diseases"! Even if you are not a smoker, you are at risk of heart disease too. Studies actually show that non-smokers who are exposed to heavy smoking environments are at risk in the same way that smokers are.

Especially if you are a patient of high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol, your chances of attaining CVD are higher than usual.

Qamrun Ahmed says, "Most of my male patients are smokers, and so I advise them to lead a lifestyle which will reduce their cigarette intake, this will create a healthy environment for non-smokers as well."

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YES, ORAL HEALTH MATTERS!

Brushing two times has more benefits than you would have ever expected. Not only does unhealthy teeth lead to gum diseases but also heart diseases.

Samia Huda, a practising dental surgeon, says: "The bacteria, which forms gum diseases, when it keeps increasing it reaches the heart through blood circulation.

This is why heart diseases may occur from gum diseases too."

DESK JOBS ARE NOT QUITE HEALTHY FOR THE HEART

Sedentary jobs are a part of our life. There is no denying that our modern lifestyle mostly revolves around desk work and requires us to sit for hours after hours. Now, you might be familiar with the fact that sitting for long hours in one position gives you back pain but did you know it causes heart diseases too? This is bad news for all of us who work desk jobs.

Not only are long hours of sedentary work bad for us but



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