

#HEALTH & FITNESS

Why men must pay closer attention to cardiac health

Heart disease remains one of the leading causes of death among men globally, and Bangladesh is no exception. As men continue to balance careers, family, and daily pressures, their hearts often bear the silent strain. On World Men's Day, experts remind us that understanding and protecting men's cardiac health is not just a medical need but a matter of self-care and longevity.

Dr Ashraf Ur Rahman is a Medicine Specialist and a Cardiologist at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD). He notes that the majority of cardiac cases he encounters involve men above the age of forty.

Dr Rahman explains that the difference between men's and women's heart health begins with hormones. Women benefit from the protective effects of oestrogen, which usually helps maintain healthy blood vessels and cholesterol levels. Men, however, lack this hormonal shield. As a result, they are naturally more susceptible to ischemic heart disease (IHD) from an earlier age. Once women reach menopause and oestrogen levels drop, their risk becomes nearly identical.

"Hormonal protection gives women a head start," Dr Rahman says. "Men, without that advantage, face heart-related risks much sooner, especially if unhealthy habits come into play."

The lifestyle link

While biology sets the stage, daily habits often determine the outcome.

"Many men also compromise food quality because they are always on the go," notes Dr Rahman. "Add irregular sleep, stress, and addictive habits like smoking, and you have a combination that quietly damages the heart over time."

Stress itself plays a major role. With modern work-life demands, men often



shoulder significant financial and emotional pressures, leading to hypertension and coronary artery disease (CAD). Genetics can intensify this risk further. Men with a family history of cardiac problems are particularly vulnerable and should begin routine screenings earlier than others.

Common conditions and overlooked symptoms

Among Bangladeshi men, the most frequently diagnosed heart conditions



include coronary artery disease, ischemic heart disease, and hypertension. These typically develop silently, progressing over years before showing clear warning signs.

"The problem is that men often do not take minor symptoms seriously," Dr Rahman warns. "Headaches, easy fatigue, chest discomfort, or swelling in the feet are not just signs of tiredness. They can be the heart's way of asking for help."

Other early indicators include shortness of breath or decreased productivity at work.

When left unchecked, these symptoms can escalate into severe cardiac events. Dr Rahman emphasises that awareness and timely response can prevent a tragedy.

"Many heart attacks could have been avoided if men had sought medical attention earlier," he adds.

The need for early diagnosis

One of Rahman's strongest messages is the importance of early screening. "Early



diagnosis makes a big difference. It can significantly prevent or slow down the severity of heart disease," he says firmly. "Prevention is always better than a cure."

He advises men over 40, especially those with a family history of heart disease, to undergo annual check-ups. Simple tests such as blood pressure measurement, lipid profiles, ECGs, and stress tests can uncover silent risk factors long before symptoms appear.

"Cardiac issues don't appear overnight," Rahman explains. "They develop gradually. The earlier you identify them, the better chance you have to protect your heart."

Small changes, big impact

While the idea of an overhauled lifestyle can sound daunting, Dr Ashraf Ur Rahman insists that heart protection does not require radical change; it requires consistency.

"Start with what you can control," he advises. "Quit smoking, choose home-

cooked meals over processed or oily food. Even small steps, if done regularly, make a real difference."

Exercise remains one of the most effective tools for maintaining heart health. Cardiologists recommend at least 30 to 45 minutes of physical activity several times a week, whether it's brisk walking, jogging, swimming, or cycling. Dr Rahman adds that the mental benefits are equally important: "Exercise helps release stress, which in turn keeps blood pressure and heart rhythm in check."

In addition, managing stress through exercise, mindfulness, adequate rest, and time away from screens can improve cardiovascular function.

World Men's Day is an opportunity to remind men that strength lies not in enduring silently, but in taking charge of their well-being. Too often, men ignore their symptoms or delay medical consultations out of fear or overconfidence.

"It's time to change that mindset," Dr Rahman says. "Health is not about appearing tough. It's about being wise enough to care for yourself."

Heart health, he stresses, is a lifelong responsibility, not a short-term goal. Early prevention, annual check-ups, and mindful habits are the pillars of a stronger, longer life.

Men often devote their energy to providing for others but forget that their own health forms the foundation of everything they do.

The message this Men's Day is clear: protect your heart before it demands your attention.

Dr Ashraf Ur Rahman concludes, "Your health is not an expense but an investment. Care for your heart now, and it will take care of you for years to come."

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