

# On World Heart Day, an appeal for change

Over 17 million people die of cardiovascular disease every year

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The reality of life is that it does not get better by chance; it only gets better with change. I speak of change on World Heart Day (September 29) because it could well be the strongest medicine for your heart.

Did you know that heart disease is reversible, that in most cases, you can change your heart health, all by yourself? Yes, with a healthier life choice, you can slash your risk of heart disease by 60 per cent. To change the world, we have to change ourselves. If each of us made a commitment to curb our excesses, be more active, and be disciplined in our diet and habits, we will experience a physical and mental awakening that will be life altering. If we aggregate this change we make as individuals, society and nations will emerge healthier and more productive.

The world grows 'weak hearted'; we have collect-

ively made bad choices, and the result is for all to see today. Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the world's leading killer, with a toll of over 17 million lives each year. India bears a heavy brunt of this onslaught. Non-communicable diseases (NCD) have assumed epidemic proportion in our nation. This ominous engine of illness is being driven by rampant CVD and diabetes. CVD accounts for 29.8 per cent of all deaths in India.

## COMMENT

Nature and nurture both play a conspicuous role in making the Indian more susceptible to heart disease. Our Indian gene has a tendency to hold on to fat; our body type ensures we are more prone to 'central obesity', as well as insulin resistance and glucose intolerance.

In insulin-resistant people, the pancreas responds by pouring out more insulin, resulting in a somewhat elev-

ated blood level of glucose and a rise in triglycerides, all linked to heart disease.

The nurture aspect is about the lifestyles we lead. The classic Indian diet is rich in processed carbohydrates and cream. Studies also suggest that Indians ingest significantly lower levels of vitamin C and other key nutrients. This lack of balanced nutrition increases the risk of heart disease.

## Risk factors

According to the World Heart Federation, at least 80% of the premature deaths, due to cardiovascular diseases can be protected by controlling four main risk factors - unhealthy diet, usage of tobacco, lack of physical activity and excessive consumption of alcohol. A healthy balanced diet, at least 30 minutes of vigorous exercise, moderation in alcohol consumption and complete abstinence from smoking are key in curbing CVD. The fight against CVD

is a battle of the will, it starts from within. Influencing the mindset is critical to success. Stakeholders in Indian healthcare have already sounded the clarion call for better heart-health.

Apollo Hospitals' Billion Hearts Beating (BHB) was a pioneering initiative on this front. Launched in 2010, BHB's mission is to raise the level of heart health awareness in the country and reverse the burden of heart disease. Over the years, BHB has touched the lives of over a million people through its various programmes.

Sometimes, taking care of the self is the most selfless thing we can do. Let's take responsibility of our health. It's the greatest gift we can give ourselves, our families and our nation. This World Heart Day remember one small thing - your heart works tirelessly, 24x7, 365 days; let's never be too busy to take care of it.

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