

At very high risk after 40

NOT IMMUNE Though the female hormone oestrogen protects young women, hypertension and diabetes make them lose this advantage after they cross 40 years

Jaya Shroff Bhalla
■ jaya.shroff@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Praveen Mathur, 42, died of a heart attack on September 2. It was his first. Though the Delhi-based entrepreneur weighed 96 kilograms, had mild diabetes and high blood pressure, he'd never had any symptoms — chest pain,

TOMORROW

Meet the people who have done it — managed to stay healthy when most of their friends and families are struggling with doctors' bills.

breathlessness, heartburn, dizziness etc — or been tested for heart disease. "In such cases, an underlying condition of uncontrolled heart rate, weak heart chambers or problematic arteries gets aggravated because of sedentary lifestyle, obesity, inactivity, smoking or high-fat diets," said Dr Neeraj Bhalla, chairman, department of cardiology at BL Kapoor Super Speciality Hospital, where 60% people treated for

a heart attack are under 65 years.

"The first heart attack often kills because people are not aware that they have heart disease," he added.

Once you hit 40, everyone needs an annual health check-up with an emphasis on blood sugar levels, lipids and blood pressure. Even if one of your parameters is uncontrolled, repeat the lipid profile twice a year till they stabilise.

Though the female hormone oestrogen protects young women against heart trouble, higher levels of hypertension and diabetes make them lose this advantage from the age of 40 years.

Surjeet Kaur, 56, was in a kitty party when she had a heart attack. She was feeling uneasy and knew that something was not right, but couldn't imagine it could be a heart attack.

"I felt terribly sick. My chest hurt and I was sweating profusely. A friend who had suffered an attack quickly put a sorbitrate under my tongue, as she probably guessed that it was more than



■ **Once you hit 40, everyone needs an annual health check-up with emphasis on blood sugar levels, lipid profile and blood pressure. Subhash Chand Dhingra realised this at 65 when he had a heart attack without warning.** ARIJIT SEN / HT PHOTO

just pain," says Kaur. Standing at 5' 1", Kaur weighs 84 kg, her blood pressure is high and sugar uncontrolled, ranging between 200 and 300 mg/DL.

"Usually, obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure are to blame, all of which

WOMEN GET A BURNING SENSATION IN THE UPPER ABDOMEN AND MAY EXPERIENCE LIGHTHEADEDNESS, AN UPSET STOMACH, AND SWEATING.

increase risk of a heart attack," says Dr S. Padmawati, chairman, National Heart Institute. Women also have more atypical symptoms. "They may have abdominal pain, tiredness and vomiting," she adds. Women who are on the contraceptive pill and smoke are at a much higher risk.

"In the last 20 years, the cases in women have gone up by over 200 times. Change in lifestyle, obesity, stress, early menopause and several other factors are behind this. The average age of women showing up with cardiac ailments has also gone down by 10 years — earlier it was 65 but now it's 55," said

Dr Ashok Seth, chairman, Fortis Escorts Heart and Research Institute.

Getting active and having a healthy weight is a good way to protect your heart. A study of 4,000 heart patients in their 40s and 50s showed that even those who switched to 2.5 hours of weekly exercise benefitted tremendously. "Indians are genetically more vulnerable to heart problems. If we studied our lipids closely, we usually have moderate LDLs (good cholesterol) but high triglycerides, a type of blood fat," says Dr Anil Dhal, director of cardiology, Delhi Heart and Lung Institute.

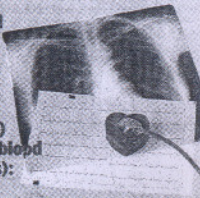
SPECIALISED SCREENING TESTS

These tests are recommended for people with more than two risk factors — high blood pressure, high LDL "bad" cholesterol, unhealthy weight, smoking, etc.

Carotid intimal medial thickness (IMT) test:
₹1,000 - ₹2,000

Tread mill test (TMT):
₹1,500 - ₹2,500

Echocardiogram (ECG)
(For people with high blood pressure and diabetes):
₹2,000 - ₹4,000

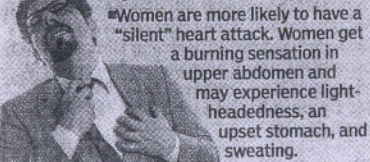


SIGNS OF TROUBLE

The typical signs of a heart attack are:

- Chest pain that moves to your shoulders, arms, neck, jaw, or back
- Pressure, fullness, tightness, or pain in your chest, lasting 5 minutes or longer
- Constant indigestion-like discomfort light-headedness, dizziness, fainting, sweating
- Nausea, sickness
- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Unexplained anxiety, weakness, or tiredness
- Palpitations, cold sweat

■ Not everyone has the classic symptoms. Although chest pain is the most common sign, you can get an attack without pain. For some people, a heart attack feels like a burning sensation, similar to heartburn, while others may feel a pain in their arm, while still others — especially people with diabetes — may not have any pain at all.



■ Women are more likely to have a "silent" heart attack. Women get a burning sensation in upper abdomen and may experience light-headedness, an upset stomach, and sweating.

Source: Harvard School of Public Health