

Awareness about warning signs of heart attack imperative in India

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It is important to educate people that undertaking treatment within the “golden hour” can save lives during a heart attack



As per recent statistics, about two million heart attacks occur every year in India and the symptoms are different in both men and women. Lack of awareness about the signs and symptoms of an impending heart attack prevent many people from seeking treatment on time. There is a need to raise awareness that time is muscle in such cases and can help save lives before complications arise.

Many people including youngsters are at a risk of heart attack today due to factors such as family history of the condition, an unhealthy lifestyle, smoking, consumption of processed food, stress, obesity, and lack of physical activity. When a person suffers from a heart attack, administering medications within the first one hour can save lives.

Speaking about this, Dr Sumeet Sethi, Associate Director - Interventional Cardiology, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket, said, “Heart attack occurs when a part of the heart muscle dies when it does not receive adequate blood flow. Some warning signs that one should be aware of include chest discomfort, upper body pain, and shortness of breath as well as an unusual feeling beginning at the centre of the chest and eventually radiating out. Women can develop pain in the jaw, neck or back, or and show symptoms such as shortness of breath, cough, or nausea. What is most important here is timely action. Not only can this help in providing immediate medical attention but also limit cardiac damage.”

Adding further, Dr Sethi, said, “Many heart attacks are entirely painless and may manifest as sudden burning sensation in chest, breathlessness, dizziness, uneasiness, vomiting or sweating. If these prolong, it could indicate a heart attack. The ‘Golden Rule’ is thus to take them immediately to a specialist within what is called the ‘Golden Hour’. If this is done, it is possible to minimize damage to the heart muscle. Primary angioplasty should be undertaken immediately.”

Primary angioplasty begins with emergency coronary angiography in which the doctor inserts thin catheters into the groin or wrist artery and generates pictures of the coronary arteries supplying the heart. The blocked artery can then be opened by passing a wire and then a balloon. Medicines can also be injected directly into the blocked vessel. A stent/ wire mesh tube is inserted into the artery to keep it open. Nowadays we use drug-eluting stents (DES) which prevent the arteries from getting blocked again by releasing an anti-proliferative drug. DES can help prevent plaque buildup, promote good blood flow to the

heart, and relieve chest pain. They may also lower the person's chances of having a repeat heart attack. These can also help the person get back to a regular life faster.