

Health

38

The percentage of women who die within a year of having heart attacks.

Why are people in their 20s and 30s dropping dead?

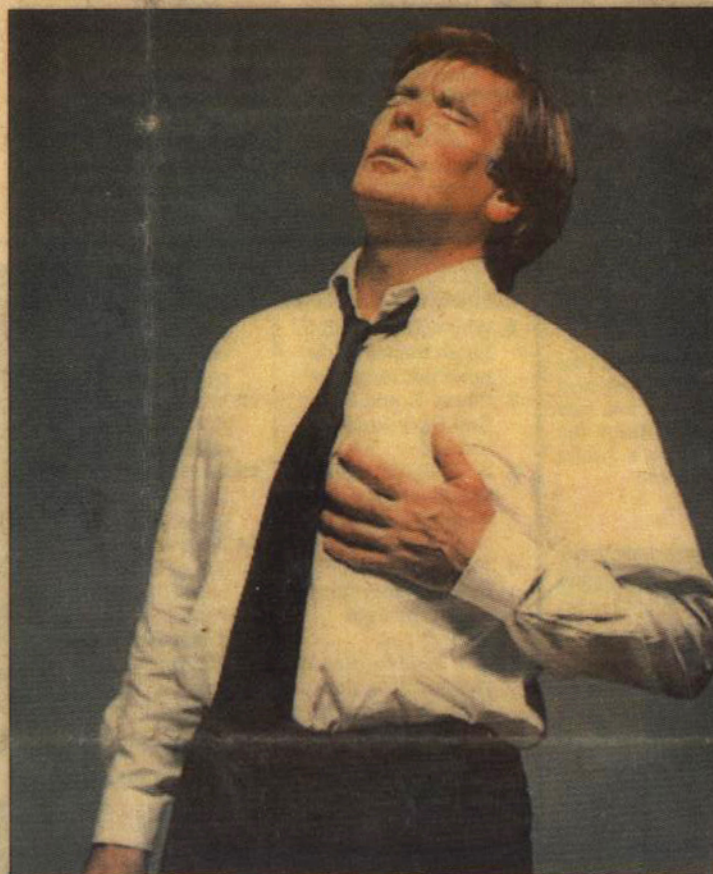
K Krishna

NO longer are only the elderly being admitted to the intensive cardiac care units. More young patients are being admitted to the hospitals with heart diseases. People are experiencing their first heart attack as early as 23.

City cardiologists and cardiac surgeons report seeing patients in their late twenties and early thirties. These patients comprise a maximum of 15 per cent of all the angioplasties done to a minimum of 5 patients annually. Earlier, heart valve diseases were more

common amongst young patients.

"The increasing incidence of heart attacks amongst the youth is due to the combination of the four Ss: smoking, stress, sugar and fats and a sedentary lifestyle," cardiologist Dr Hemant Kumar observed. Interventional cardiologist Dr Suresh Vijan, for instance, has seen a number of young executives coming in with heart attacks. "The stress of meeting deadlines, late nights and lack of exercise all take their toll," he explained. "People are earning more. But they are also working longer hours and are more stressed out," agreed Dr Robin



MATTER OF THE HEART: The increasing number of heart attacks amongst the youth is due to the combination of the four Ss: smoking, stress, sugar and fats and a sedentary lifestyle

Balani was under stress



FILM director Anant Balani passed away on Thursday from a massive cardiac arrest. In his early forties, Balani was Bollywood's most promising young director. His films included Gawaahi, Jazbaat and the recently released Joggers' Park.

Balani had a chequered career. He directed Gawaahi in 1989 with

Zeenat Aman, Ranjeeta, Shekhar Kapur and Ashutosh Gowariker. He then made Patthar Ke Phool, with Salman Khan and Raveena Tandon in 1991. Four years later, he directed Jazbaat, featuring Rohit Roy and singer Suchitra Krishnamurthy (Shekhar Kapur's wife).

According to those who knew him, Jazbaat's failure put him neck deep in debt. Over the years, the amount owed to creditors multiplied dangerously.

He had no permanent address and none of his friends knew where he lived. "He travelled by taxis and autorickshaws. If a friend dropped him home, he would get off the car at a distance from where he lived," recalls a colleague. He also became grossly overweight (weighing approximately 130 kilos) and also smoked and drank.

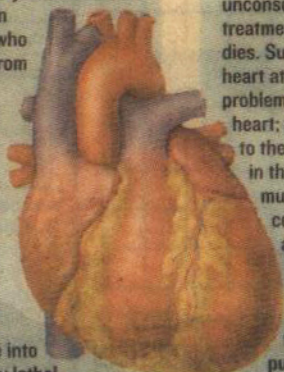
His luck was beginning to change, but his lifestyle got the better of him.

What Is Tachycardia?

FAST, abnormal heart rhythms are called tachyarrhythmias. You may have heard your doctor talk about two types that are related to the heart's ventricles: ventricular tachycardia (VT) and ventricular fibrillation (VF).

Tachyarrhythmias occur in individuals of all ages, from young children to the elderly. Studies have shown that VT often occurs in patients who have had damage from a heart attack, cardiac surgery, or other conditions. Some people with inherited heart defects also experience VT. Sometimes VT affects individuals with no history of a heart condition.

VT can change into VF, which is a highly lethal rhythm disturbance. VF can lead to cardiac arrest and ultimately sudden death. Sudden death due to cardiac arrest affects 3,50,000 people each year in the United States (meaning that almost 1,000 die from it each day).



What is Sudden Cardiac Arrest?

SUDDEN cardiac arrest occurs when the heart's lower chambers (ventricles) suddenly develop a rapid, irregular rhythm (ventricular fibrillation) and the quivering ventricles cannot pump blood to the body. Within seconds, the person will not have a pulse and will be unconscious. Without immediate treatment, the person almost always dies. Sudden cardiac arrest is not a heart attack. A heart attack is a problem with the plumbing of the heart; the arteries delivering blood to the heart are blocked. Oxygen in the blood can't reach the heart muscle which is damaged. In contrast, sudden cardiac arrest occurs because of an electrical problem in the heart. Just like a water pump needs an energy force to make it work, the heart's pumping mechanism is powered by electrical signals. During a sudden cardiac arrest, the electrical system to the pump suddenly becomes irregular. Of greatest concern in the first few minutes is that blood flow to the brain will be reduced so drastically, a person loses consciousness.

Pinto, cardiologist at the Holy Family Hospital.

Smoking is another common factor. A recent study covering 5,000 heart attack patients at the Sir J J Group of hospitals found that 95 per cent of the patients were smokers. Dr B K Goyal, director, interventional cardiology, Bombay Hospital, did the study.

Eating out in restaurants as compared to consuming home-cooked food, smoking, consuming alcohol and stress all increase cholesterol levels, said Jyoti Lalwani, dietitian, Hinduja Hospital. "People should include more fibre in their diet, since this draws out bad cholesterol," she added. Also, merely changing to healthier oils doesn't help, she cautioned. "The amount of oil consumed is important," Lalwani explained.

By virtue of their hormones, women are protected from heart attacks till menopause. But women too, are having heart attacks younger.

The use of contraceptive pills, stress and increasing incidence of

smoking in women were causative factors. "Earlier, women would have heart attacks from the age of 50 onwards. We have started getting cases of women in their 40s now," Dr Goyal said.

Though heart attacks are sudden events, they rarely occur unannounced. "Warning symptoms like chest pain and a feeling of exhaustion whilst doing routine activities usually surface a week to 10 days before the actual heart attack," Dr Vijan said. 'Chest discomfort' comes masked in varied forms. "It could be in the form of hyper-acidity or gas in the stomach. In such a case, people should immediately go for a consultation," Dr Kumar said.

"Also, never walk if you feel you are having a stroke. Ask someone to call an ambulance," he added.

"Heart attacks at this age are preventable. People who have these risk factors should be careful

and should undergo an ECG after 40. They should undergo all tests if they have risk factors and symptoms," Dr A Choughule, cardiac surgeon at the Lilavati Hospital said. Dr Kumar recommends a check-up on graduation day and one every five years after that. However, Dr Vijan differs.

"These patients are too young to undergo such check-ups. Lifestyle modification will do," he said.

Survivor speak

"A HEART ATTACK was farthest from my mind. I never thought it was possible, not at this age at least," Manoj Jain (26), said. Jain felt uneasy when he woke up on the morning of July 11. It progressed to a dull pain by the time he was dressed for work.

"I thought it was acidity, but my family doctor recommended an ECG. It showed a severe heart attack and I was admitted to Nanavati," Jain recalled.

Jain exhibited all the risk factors - family history (his father had expired from a heart attack), risk behaviors (he smoked about 10 cigarettes daily and chewed tobacco), he regularly consumed spicy, calorie-laden foods and didn't exercise.

Post-attack, the businessman has changed his lifestyle. The father of a three-year-old daughter, Jain has quit smoking, goes on walks everyday and is trying to lose weight. His diet has become lighter and easily digestible and contains less oil and spices.

"What should happen at 50 has happened now. I need to be careful," Jain said.

A HEART ATTACK was the last thing Sanjay Thombre (30) had on his mind. Thombre was honeymooning with his wife when he experienced chest pain. "I dismissed it as acidity. But when it worsened, the doctor recommended an ECG," Thombre said. Doctors found 25 per cent and 30 per cent blockage and performed an angioplasty.

A Bandra-based dentist (23), was in his hostel room in Karnataka when he experienced acute pain. "I couldn't understand what was happening. I was immediately shifted to the hospital where they diagnosed a heart attack," the dentist said. "My father expired due to a heart attack at 50, so the family history is there," he said.

He admitted to high stress levels at that time. He also had high homocysteine levels. "I have decided to just get on with life now though I am taking precautions. I have cut down on oil and alcohol consumption," he said.

You are at risk if you...

- Have a family history of heart disease
- Smoke
- Drink
- Do not exercise
- Work long hours in high stress
- Are fat around the stomach
- Eat out at least once a day (workplace canteen included)

How not to become a statistic...

- Quit smoking
- Cut down alcohol intake
- Try to unwind more often.
- Tone down the pace of life.
- Cut down on oil, ghee and fried items. Fats should make up less than 5 per cent of your total food intake.
- Consult a doctor if you experience chest pain or uneasiness.