

Heart 'e' Health

Connecting the dots on heart disease and mental stress

The heart is a very interesting organ! If you think about it, it starts beating at about 6 weeks of intrauterine life and goes on non-stop till our last breath. Yes, that is exactly why it is said to have a “womb to tomb” role in our lives!

Though the heart does not depend on signals from the brain for its routine functioning, there is an indisputable connection between the mind and the heart. This connection formed through nerves, hormones and other chemical reactions is a very effective and dynamic connection, paving way for the mirroring of our thoughts and feelings in the rate, rhythm and beating capacity of the heart.

Medical research in the last few decades has thrown light on the close association between mental health issues and overall wellness, especially cardiac health. Depression, anxiety, loneliness and grief are some well-recognized psychosocial risk factors for heart problems but severe and chronic mental stress has become the all-pervasive, all-encompassing cardiovascular risk factor of the present times.



Workshop participants practicing stress management techniques like meditation and deep breathing

This World Heart Day, we conducted a survey to study the presence of behavioral risk factors for heart disease among college-going women in Chennai. Of the 554 students aged 15-30 years who responded to this questionnaire-based survey, almost 40% reported to be chronically stressed. We have also noted a similar trend of staggeringly high rates of chronic mental stress among young corporate employees. Intensive lifestyle modification supervised by medical professionals has proven effective in changing dietary, exercise, sleep and stress-related risk factors in all age groups.

Team Cardiac Wellness Institute has been conducting lifestyle intervention programs for corporates, educational institutions and organizations and has successfully demonstrated a marked improvement in health behavior, body weight parameters and biochemical parameters of participants. Our aim is to help individuals better understand their stress triggers and better manage their stress levels, thereby preventing stress-related health hazards in the long run.

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Past Events

Heart Champs Workshop @ MOP Vaishnav College - 13 September 2019



Awareness talk on heart diseases



Exercise session for students



Workshop activities during diet session

Heart Champs Workshop @ SDNB Vaishnav College - 18 September 2019



Stress management session



Talk on healthy diet for students



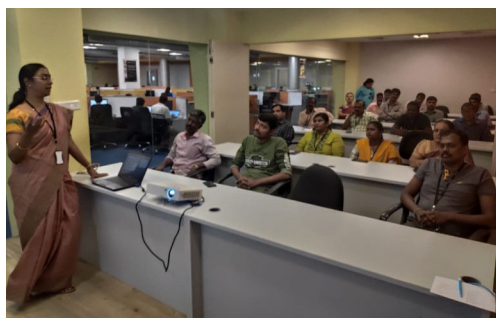
Students learning exercises from Exercise expert

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Ongoing Events

Corporate Health & Wellness Program



Health education by Physician



Yoga session with Yoga Instructor



Exercise session with Physiotherapist



Diet Counselling by Dietician



Psychosocial Counseling by Psychologist

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Regular Exercise for Mental Wellbeing

If you're wondering if there is any relationship between regular exercise and mental wellbeing, please read on for clarity on this important health aspect!

The most common mental health problems we see today are chronic stress, anxiety, depression, mood swings and insomnia. In fact, dementia is a dreaded disease of old age and is very prevalent in India at the moment. The underlying reasons for these are many but the key to keeping our minds healthy is - **REGULAR EXERCISE**.



There is strong evidence from medical research across the globe to prove that exercise has the following benefits on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing:

- Stress-relieving hormones or the “happy hormones” serotonin and endorphins which elevate our mood, relieve stress and keep our brains active and healthy are secreted during exercise
- Exercise has a thermogenic effect (rise in body temperature) which in turn helps us sleep better
- Regular exercise brings about a shift from a lethargy paradigm to an active healthy lifestyle which means that negative thoughts, sedentary behavior and unhealthy dietary habits will all change for the better
- The stress hormones in our body, mainly cortisol and adrenaline, increase during exercise and fall to baseline post exercise, thus individuals who are chronically stressed will start seeing the stress-busting effect of exercise when they exercise regularly
- The more active you and more time you spend on exercise, with increasing age higher the chances of staying away from dementia.

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The **Physical Activity Guidelines by American Heart Association** clearly mentions we should all engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week to reap the full benefits of exercise on the mind, heart and other organs.

Let us see how to break up these 150 minutes per week into daily exercise sessions:

- Engage in moderate intensity aerobic exercise on at least 5 days a week for a minimum of 30 minutes each day
- Do strength training exercises at moderate intensity for a minimum of 20 minutes on 2 to 3 days a week
- Incorporate yoga, meditation and breathing exercise in your weekly exercise routine to relieve stress and to handle stressful situations better
- Engage in other activities like dancing, zumba, trekking and hiking for both variety and fun in exercising



In short, mental health and wellbeing can be preserved through regular exercise. Individuals with diagnosed mental health issues should take professional help from psychologists, psychiatrists and exercise experts to find the best lifestyle solution for their condition. After all physical, mental and psychosocial wellbeing are interconnected and interdependent and knowing that help is available is a big plus!

Ideal nutrition for superior mental health

The World Health Organisation says ‘There is no health without mental health!’

The brain controls our thoughts, memory and speech, movement and the function of many organs within our body and it works hard 24/7, even while we are asleep. This means your brain requires a constant supply of fuel. That fuel comes from the foods we eat and what’s in that fuel makes all the difference. New research finds that our food choices may also affect our mood and mental health. This is called as ‘food-mood connection’.

On the other hand, unmanaged stress and foul mood may also lead to unhealthy eating practices. If you think back at what you ate during the high-stress days at work, you might recollect that it was more of junk foods, oily foods and sugary foods. We need to end this vicious cycle of stress or anxiety leading to an unhealthy diet which in turn worsens the mental health condition.

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The common mental problems that are currently prevalent in numerous countries are depression, anxiety, mood swings, insomnia and chronic stress. Depression is a disorder associated with major symptoms such as increased sadness and anxiety, loss of appetite, depressed mood, and a loss of interest in pleasurable activities.

High-quality foods that contain lots of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants nourish the brain and protect from stress. Diets high in refined sugars are harmful to the brain. In addition to worsening your body's regulation of insulin, they also promote inflammation resulting in stress and even a worsening of symptoms of mood disorders, such as depression.

In some studies, people who consume an unhealthy diet were more likely to report symptoms of depression or other mental health issues, which makes it clear that there is an association between certain nutrients in food and emotional wellbeing.

The nutrients and their sources that should be part of a mind-healthy diet are:

- Omega-3 fatty acids (fish, nuts and oil seeds)
- Folic acid (cereals, green leafy vegetables and animal-based foods)
- Vitamin D (fatty fish, dairy products, egg yolk)
- Magnesium (greens, nuts and seeds)
- B vitamins (whole grains, nuts and seeds)
- Tryptophan (milk, egg, seeds, greens)

Good food for mental health and wellness:

- The main constituents of diet should be plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains and nuts followed by fish and lean meats and healthy fats. Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibers we need. Consuming a variety of different colored fruits and vegetables every day provides a good range of nutrients
- The gut and the brain are the two most closely connected organs within the body. Probiotic (yogurt, curd) supplements containing the good bacteria produce neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine, which play a role in mood regulation, anxiety reduction, and stress management
- At the same time, processed foods should be avoided as they contain high levels of unhealthy fats, sugars and refined carbohydrates.

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Here are some positive changes you can make to improve your eating to support your mental health:

- Eat at set intervals throughout the day. If blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. Eating regularly and choosing foods that release energy slowly will help to keep your sugar levels steady
- Avoid refined grains and sugars and eat more whole grains
- Include protein-rich foods in each meal
- Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables
- Include omega-3 rich foods, like oily fish, flax seeds and chia seeds in your diet
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water
- Get regular exercise

Following a healthy eating plan can keep you energized and help you to feel better, as good nutrition is an important component of your emotional wellbeing. In short, what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and ultimately, your mood. So choose a healthy diet and ensure your mental well being!

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