

Sowkhya

April 2015

Magazine™

**ALCOHOL
AND YOUR
HEART**



**IT'S TIME TO TACKLE
THE PROBLEM!**

Hello Dear Readers, and Welcome to Yet Another Edition of Sowkhya Magazine™.

We hope this finds you in the very best of health and 'spirits'. In this edition, in keeping with 'spirits', we talk about how alcohol can affect the heart muscle, and what the impact of this widely enjoyed group of drinks can be on one's health and well being. With the popping up of bars and clubs every day, more and more youngsters are heading out with their friends for their weekend 'session' of laughs and drinks. Binge drinking is as bad as regular drinking, and can have the same detrimental impact on the vital organs systems. Reports from the WHO have revealed a steep rise in alcohol intake in India, with Kerala leading the states with around 8 litres of alcohol being consumed per year by an average individual over 15 years of age! Over 30% of our population drinks alcohol, of which 11% binge drink. This is clearly a problem that we need to face head on and tackle effectively.

In addition to just alcohol, we also have talked about childhood obesity – a problem that is rising in India and is impacting the future health of our kids. As always, we have other little bites of information that we hope you will find useful. Happy reading!



Dr B V Baliga
MBBS MRCP PhD MBA

Author, Sowkhya Magazine™



Dr B G Baliga
MD FRCP FICC

Editor, Sowkhya Magazine™

Alcohol and the Heart – Let's Stop It In Its Tracks!

In the recent years, there has been a great surge in the quantity of alcohol consumed by people across India. With easy availability of spirits and wines not just from India but also from the Western world, partaking in this on a regular basis seems to have become the norm for many.

Many of us are aware that alcohol can damage the liver, but did you know that alcohol intake on a regular basis can damage the heart? You may be shocked to hear that alcohol contributes to the development of over 60 different diseases in our body, and heart disease is one of them.

So what are the effects of alcohol on the heart? Here we take a brief look.

The bad

Studies have shown that consuming alcoholic beverages on a regular basis can increase the levels of certain kinds of fats in the body. These fats are called 'triglycerides'. Recent studies published in reputed cardiology journals have shown that elevated levels of triglycerides may be associated with an increased risk of developing coronary heart disease.

Alcohol is very high in calories, with 1 gm of alcohol providing 7 calories. Large amounts consumed regularly can increase the level of body fat, and this in turn leads to the development of obesity. You may have seen the abdomen of people who drink alcohol – they tend to be quite large and are often called 'beer bellies'. The problem with having an increased amount of body fat (especially around the waist) is that it can increase the chances of developing high blood pressure and diabetes. People who drink alcohol also tend to smoke and this only further increases the risk of heart problems.

Alcohol can also weaken the heart muscle. This condition is called alcoholic cardiomyopathy. In this condition, the heart muscle is unable to pump blood effectively to the various vital organs and muscles, leading to organ failure and extreme weakness. Breathlessness and swelling in the legs are common symptoms. Patients who develop alcoholic cardiomyopathy require many medications to support their heart. Their outcome is poor and the survival rate is low, especially if the person does not quit alcohol.

Alcohol can also increase the heart rate, and can make the heart beat rather erratically. The erratic heartbeat tends to be irregular, and is usually in a rhythm that is called atrial fibrillation. Atrial fibrillation that begins after heavy intake of alcohol is sometimes called 'holiday heart syndrome', as it is often seen in people who binge drink when on holiday. Atrial fibrillation can lead to weakening of the heart muscle if left untreated.

Finally, alcohol can increase the risk of developing a stroke. The risk factors for stroke are the same as heart disease, and include high blood pressure, diabetes and smoking. All these 3 are seen in individuals who drink regularly.

Is there a bright side?

As a matter of fact there is. Consuming alcohol in **moderation** can have certain benefits on the heart, and this has mostly been seen with red wine. Red wine has antioxidants, flavonoids and a compound called *resveratrol* in it that can protect the heart from the development of heart disease. However, these benefits can only be seen in individuals over 45 years who drink only one drink a day (around 2 units).

What can I do?

If you really wish to partake in alcohol, then make sure you do so in moderation. Of course, avoidance is the best strategy, but if you like to drink regularly, then do your best to make sure you have at least 2 'alcohol free' days a week. Just bear in mind that 10 ml of spirits is one unit and one glass of beer is around 3 units. Keep a tab of what you drink, and you can keep your heart healthy and enjoy life as well! Our recommendation – Avoid it as much as you can!

Why Are We The Way We Are?

Confused? Allow us to explain.

The human body is made of trillions of cells. Each of these cells contains within them proteins that define how we look and appear to others.



These proteins are called 'genes', often called DNA in the medical world. There are literally billions and billions of copies of DNA in our body, and DNA is unique to that individual.

DNA, or **De-oxyribo Nucleic Acid**, is inherited from our parents and is responsible for our genetic makeup. 99.5% of the parent's DNA is shared by the children. This would explain why we share features similar to our parents (interestingly around 40% of the DNA we have is similar to the cabbage!).

Research conducted in Oxford University has shown that DNA could dictate if we are right or left handed. Clinical conditions such as Down syndrome, schizophrenia and other disorders are all linked to faulty DNA.

In the recent years, much attention is being paid to whether our DNA has something to do with our behaviour. While the jury is still out on this one, the link to behaviour is now being explored and used in the courts of law in the US (read an excellent article in National Geographic - <http://tinyurl.com/dnacourt>). It would be interesting to see what transpires regarding this theory, and how it might be twisted in the future to win court battles. Until then, let us safely assume that our behaviour is dictated by influence from family, society and our peers.

In a sense, DNA dictates how we appear to others – the colour of our hair, our eyes and our height. How we behave is completely up to us.

Sushruta – The First Ever Surgeon

There is a common misconception that most of what we know today in Medicine comes from research that was conducted in the Western world. While this might be partly true, as Indians, we are proud that we in fact did have the first ever surgeon in the world – Sushruta – all the way back in 600 BC!

Sushruta is fondly called the 'father of surgery', and his works published in the *Sushrutasamhita* details many of the surgeries and medicines that are in use to this day. In fact, it contains over 180 chapters, discusses over 1,100 illnesses and talks about over 700 medicinal plants!



Some of the procedures he discussed include tooth extraction, caesarean section, prostate gland surgery, piles management and even treatment of fractures. He is even credited to the development of surgical instruments. Detailed descriptions of human anatomy can be found in the book. Surgery was performed without the need of anaesthesia, with the patient rendered intoxicated.

It is truly remarkable how a man with literally no tools like we have today treated the ill and saved many a life. If you would like to read more, visit <http://tinyurl.com/sussam>.

Childhood Obesity – A Growing Problem

A recent article published on the BBC UK website talked about how most UK families do not realise it when their child is obese. In a study of nearly 3000 families, only 4 realised that their child was overweight!! While there are no statistics with respect to the Indian population, it appears that childhood obesity is a rising problem.

Unfortunately, the fact about childhood obesity that the Indian population fails to understand is that it is **a serious problem**. Health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure start developing at a very young age, before they manifest in adulthood. Depression and low self esteem has also been linked to childhood obesity.

What leads to childhood obesity?

There are 2 primary reasons – unhealthy diet and lack of exercise. A diet that is rich in fried foods and excess carbohydrates can drastically increase body weight. Fast foods, preserved foods and junk foods are other known culprits. Sitting in front of the television or playing computer games all day can convert the calories eaten to body fat. These days, smart phones have led to children spending most of their time on them – another reason for obesity. Genetics and hormonal changes may of course play a role, but this is extremely rare.

My child is well fed – what harm can that do?

This is a common perception amongst some parents who feel their child is not overweight but is just 'well fed' and 'has a good appetite'. We worry when our child 'does not eat enough'. But over-feeding your child, especially with high calorie food, can increase their future risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and even asthma (due to the excessive weight they are carrying). Girls are at risk of early puberty and menstruation due to hormone imbalances that develop. Overweight kids can get bullied, leading to low self esteem and depression. Sleep problems and liver disease can also occur. The lack of social skills due to exclusion from peer groups can lead to behavioural and learning problems.

What can you do?

As a parent, your child's health is your responsibility. Encourage the intake of healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables regularly. Keep eating junk foods and fast foods a rarity. Limit their consumption of sugary drinks – opt for water or fresh juices instead. Make sure they exercise regularly. Keep them slim and trim and they will go on to lead healthy lives!



Calcaneal Spur – A Pain In The Foot!

Our foot is probably the part of our body that is under the most amount of stress every day. We walk, run, jump, skip, hop, tiptoe and even dance on our feet, placing the bones and tendons under a great deal of stress.

As babies, the bottom of our feet has plenty of fat, making them soft and spongy to touch. As we get older, the bones become harder, tendons become firmer and muscles become stronger. On the under surface of the foot is a tendon structure called the 'plantar fascia'. This is in the shape of a hand held fan, with the narrow end attached to the heel bone, and the broad end inserted to the toes.

What is a calcaneal spur?

The heel bone is also called the calcaneum. This bone is under constant pressure when we stand, walk etc. This pressure can lead to tearing and injury to the surrounding tendons, plantar fascia and to the surface membrane of the bone itself. Injury leads to formation of new bone tissue which is hard and 'pointy'. This is called a 'heel spur' or calcaneal spur.

Who is at risk?

People who stand for long hours on their feet, athletes and those who are overweight are at a high risk. Individuals with diabetes and those who wear poorly fitted shoes are also at risk.



What are the symptoms?

Patients often complain of heel pain. The pain is worse when standing or walking. It can feel like a pin being driven into the foot. Some people describe it as a sharp pain in the heel. The pain can be worse in the morning in some cases.

Diagnosis and treatment

Diagnosis can be easily made through an x-ray test. Stretching exercises of the foot can help loosen the tendons and reduce the strain on the spur and plantar fascia. Wearing comfortable footwear is recommended. Some patients may benefit from a course of physiotherapy. Painkillers can help, but the relief may only be temporary. Weight loss is strongly recommended. Special orthotic insoles are available which can help (available online at <http://baligadiagnostics.com/heelspur>). Surgery is reserved for patients who do not respond to 9 to 12 months of medical therapy. Wearing well fitted shoes and maintaining a healthy weight can prevent heel spurs.

Almonds – Nature's Superfoods.

When it comes to some of the healthiest foods on the planet, there are only a few that form the crème de la crème. Almonds are one such foods that are classed in this group.



So what are the health benefits of eating almonds?

Well, eating a small portion of almonds a day can give your body the calcium and phosphorus it needs, which in turn keeps the bones strong. Almonds, along with other nuts, can help reduce the risk of heart attacks by nearly 50%! In addition, they also reduce the concentration of bad cholesterol in the blood.

Almonds are rich in riboflavin and L-carnitine. These are nutrients that help improve overall brain activity and memory power. In the long run, they could reduce the chance of developing memory problems such as Alzheimer's disease.

Almonds are also rich in anti-oxidant substances called flavonoids. These help fight harmful toxins in the blood stream, thus maintaining healthy blood vessels.

How much should be we eating?

Always eat almonds as a snack and a part of a healthy, balanced diet. Overeating can cause weight gain. A handful a day (around 8 – 10) is often enough.

Amazing Facts About Our Heart And Blood Vessels

The human heart beats over 1 lakh times a day, pumping blood through a total of nearly 80,000 km of blood vessels we have in our body. By moving around different protons and electrons, the heart is able to generate its own electricity. The heart is the most active muscle in the human body, working tirelessly from the moment we are born till the moment we are no more. In fact, it starts to beat at 4 weeks after conception, and is visible on the early pregnancy scan. It is the size of a small coriander seed. Lack of sleep can make the heart beat irregularly sometimes.



Specialist Cardiac Care Package

At Baliga Diagnostics Pvt. Ltd, we believe that having a healthy heart is quintessential to having a healthy life.

Get A Full Check Up Of Your Heart With Our Specialist Cardiac Care Package.

Tests Include:

1. Hemoglobin, Peripheral Smear, Fasting Blood Sugar, Full Lipid Profile, Renal Function Tests, SGPT (Liver).
2. Electrocardiogram
3. Echocardiography
4. Exercise Tolerance Test
5. Q-Risk score Assessment + Consultation

For more information, please ask our receptionist or call us -

Baliga Diagnostics Pvt. Ltd.

(080) 266 46793
(080) 224 43330

www.baligadiagnostics.com

Get **Sowkhya Magazine™**
FREE in your email inbox
every month!

Just visit

www.baligadiagnostics.com

and enter your email address
to receive the newsletter in
the first week of every month.



[www.facebook.com/
baligadiagnostics](https://www.facebook.com/baligadiagnostics)