



INDIAN COUNCIL OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Department of Health Research – Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India

Media report (9 March to 15 March 2019)
(Health News)

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Moderate alcohol consumption associated with high blood pressure: Study

March 9, 2019/The Times of India

If you believe that moderate alcohol consumption is harmless, a recent research is here to prick that bubble. The study shows that moderate alcohol consumption—seven to 13 drinks per week—substantially raises one's risk of high blood pressure. The findings contrast with some previous studies that associated moderate drinking with a lower risk of some forms of heart disease. Most previous studies, however, have not assessed high blood pressure among moderate drinkers. Since hypertension is a leading risk factor for heart attack and stroke, the new study calls into question the notion that moderate alcohol consumption benefits heart health. Alcohol's impact on blood pressure could stem from a variety of factors, according to researchers. Because alcohol increases appetite and is, itself, very energy-dense, drinking often leads to greater caloric intake overall. Alcohol's activities in the brain and liver could also contribute to spikes in blood pressure. Data for the research came from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Study (NHANES), a large, decades-long study led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Overall, the average blood pressure was about 109/67 mm Hg among never-drinkers, 128/79 mm Hg among moderate drinkers and 153/82 mm Hg among heavy drinkers. Findings of the study were discussed in a meeting held at American College of Cardiology 68th Annual Scientific Session. In their analysis, researchers adjusted for age, sex, race, income and cardiovascular risk to separate the effects from alcohol consumption from other factors with known links to hypertension.

"This study is not only large but diverse in terms of race and gender," Aladin said. "The results are very informative for future research and practice. If you are drinking a moderate or large amount of alcohol, ask your provider to check your blood pressure at each visit and help you cut down your drinking and eventually quit," said Amer Aladin, study's lead author.

Passive smoking can raise kidney disease risk

March 9, 2019/Hindustan Times

Besides affecting your heart and lungs, exposure to second-hand or passive smoking can also raise the chances of chronic kidney disease (CKD), which can lead to renal failure, warns a new study. The findings showed that individuals with less or more than 3 days of exposure per week had nearly double the risk of having kidney disease when compared with participants with no second-hand cigarette exposure.

"Second-hand smoke exposure at home or in the workplace is still prevalent despite legislative actions prohibiting public smoking," said Jung Tak Park from Yonsei University in Seoul.

"This exposure was found to be clearly related with CKD, even with less-frequent amounts of second-hand smoke exposure," Park added.

For the study, published in the Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology, the team included 131,196 non-smokers and was classified into three

groups: no-exposure, less than three days per week of exposure, and three or more days per week of exposure. Cigarette smoking and exposure to second-hand smoking have been linked with higher risks of various diseases. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), smoking tobacco is globally the second leading cause of heart diseases after high blood pressure. Nearly 12 per cent of cardiovascular deaths worldwide occur due to tobacco abuse and second-hand smoking. The global health body states that of the seven million lives that tobacco claims worldwide each year, almost 900,000 are passive-smokers.

Avoid the kidney busters

March 9, 2019/The Tribune

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a “silent killer” which could be as fatal as diabetes and hypertension, but carries a much lower profile, with less awareness about it in society. It is, however, important to recognise the growing epidemic of CKD in young adults in our country. In a study in Chennai, 6 per cent prevalence of urinary protein leakage was noted in a sample population of young adults.

Young people often ignore warning signs about their health such as odd readings of high blood pressure, headaches, frothy urine, leg swelling and fatigue, etc.

The genesis of kidney disease can usually start early in youth and largely with the onset of modifiable risk factors.

Risk factors for CKD in young adults:

1. Low birth weight (28 per cent of children are < 2.5 kg at birth).
2. Hypo-vitaminosis (condition of abnormally high storage levels of vitamins like A or D, which can lead to toxic symptoms) and under-nutrition of the pregnant mother may lead to smaller kidney volume at birth, hence lower eGFR (filtration efficiency).
3. Co-sanguinity and genetic inbreeding can lead to greater risk of congenital anomalies of the renal tract at birth.
4. Kidney filter diseases may result from the impact of poverty, poor sanitation, pollutants, water contamination, overcrowding, exposure to unknown nephrotoxins (heavy metals, plant toxins, indigenous remedies) and lack of access to affordable health care.
5. Growing burden of hypertension and diabetes in India.
6. Scarcity of nephrologists.
7. Autoimmune diseases such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).
8. Consumption of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pain medicines, use of steroids and excesses of whey protein / muscle gain products in an attempt to build muscle bulk and enhance body image. It can cause severe kidney filter damage, proteinuria and increased risk of stone formation.

Vitamin D may help control asthma

March 10, 2019/Hindustan Times

Besides making bones strong, higher levels of Vitamin D can also help children with asthma become more resilient to harmful respiratory effects caused by indoor air pollution, say researchers including one of an Indian-origin.

“Asthma is an immune-mediated disease,” said lead author Sonali Bose, Assistant Professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. “From previous scientific studies we knew that vitamin D was a molecule that may influence asthma by impacting antioxidant or immune-related pathways,” she added.

The researchers observed that having low blood vitamin D levels was related to harmful respiratory effects of indoor air pollution from sources such as cigarette smoke, cooking, burning of candles, and incense, among children with asthma.

Conversely, in homes that had the highest indoor air pollution, higher blood vitamin D levels were associated with fewer asthma symptoms in children. Importantly, the findings showed that the effects were most pronounced among obese children, Bose said.

“This highlights a third factor at play here - the obesity epidemic - and helps bring that risk to light when considering individual susceptibility to asthma.”

For the study, published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice*, the researchers tested three factors - air pollution levels in homes, blood vitamin D levels, and asthma symptoms - in 120 schoolchildren with pre-existing asthma. One-third of the children were obese.

“One way to increase blood vitamin D levels is to increase sun exposure, but that isn’t always possible in urban environments, or in people with darker skin pigmentation,” Bose said.

“Another way is through dietary supplements or eating more foods that are high in vitamin D, such as fatty fish, mushrooms, or foods fortified with vitamin D, such as bread, orange juice, or milk.”

Migraine raises risk of dry eyes

March 10, 2019/Hindustan Times

Suffering from migraine? You could be at higher odds of having chronic dry eye disease, says a new study. The chronic dry eye is a common disease in which natural tears fail to adequately lubricate the eyes, thus affecting its functioning and lessening a person’s quality of life. The study showed that people with migraine had a 20% higher risk of having dry eye disease, the HealthDay reported. For men, aged 65 or above, having migraine nearly doubled the odds of dry eye disease, and risk in women of the same age was almost 2.5 times. The association between migraine and dry eye was found to be more among the elderly, particularly for women due to hormonal changes caused by pregnancy, the use of oral contraceptives and menopause, the researchers said.

“Physicians caring for patients with a history of migraine headaches should be aware that these patients may be at risk for concurrent dry eye disease,” said Richard Davis, ophthalmologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the US. For the study, the team examined 73,000 adults. The findings, published in the journal *JAMA Ophthalmology*, showed 8-34% of adults may be affected by dry eye disease. Excessive dryness of the eye’s surface might work on key nerve pathways to help trigger migraines, they added. In addition, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, thyroid problems, exposure to smoke, wind and dry climates, and long-term use of contact lenses can also lead to dry eyes, the study noted.

Standardise equipment to measure blood pressure

March 11, 2019/Hindustan Times



I keep coming back to certain issues because of their importance and one such topic is the lack of stringent quality control and standardisation in the blood pressure measuring instruments in the country and their adverse impact on the health of the population. In recent times, the government has launched major campaigns, rightly so, to attack the main causes of morbidity and mortality among citizens and I refer here particularly to hypertension.. However, the success of the programme hinges on the accuracy of the blood pressure measuring instruments and unfortunately, not enough attention has been paid to ensuring the quality and accuracy of these measuring instruments. . Absence of two yearly verification of the accuracy of the machines as required under the Legal Metrology Rules, also result in inaccurate measurement of blood pressure. (I am only writing about the mostly commonly used machine in hospitals and clinics in the country- - sphygmomanometer in this column). I have come across several cases of inaccuracies in the machine resulting in people without hypertension being prescribed high doses of hypertensive medication, with disastrous consequences and vice versa. One may dismiss these as anecdotal examples, but not scientific studies. One such study, titled “Equipment errors: A prevalent cause for fallacies in blood pressure recording-A Point Prevalence and Estimate from an Indian Health University”, published in the Indian Journal of Community Medicine (B.Mishra, et all, Jan-March 2013) throws the spotlight on the poor enforcement of the Legal Metrology Act and rules vis-à-vis sphygmomanometers. . The research, carried out in a rural health university in Maharashtra, chose 50 mercury sphygmomanometers in regular use in hospital wards, outpatient department, casualty and at the medical college basic science department and found defects affecting the measurement in all of them, pointing to the need for better quality control and standardization, besides, regular verification and certification of those instruments in use.

Heart attacks also common in young adults

March 11, 2019/Hindustan Times

A heart attack, known earlier as a disease of the old, is now strikingly common in people aged 40 and below, finds a study. The study compared people aged 41-50 years and 40 or younger heart attack survivors and found that among patients who suffer a heart attack at a young age overall is 40 or younger.

In addition, the proportion of people below 40 having a heart attack has been increasing, rising by 2% each year for the last 10 years. “It used to be incredibly rare to see anyone under age 40 come in with a heart attack and some of these people are now in their 20s and early 30s,” said Ron Blankstein, Associate Professor at Harvard University. Importantly, youngest heart attack survivors have the same likelihood of dying from another heart attack or stroke as survivors over 10 years older. While the traditional risk factors include diabetes, high blood pressure, smoking, family history of premature heart attack and high cholesterol, substance abuse, including marijuana and cocaine were more the reason behind the increased heart attacks in younger patients. The findings will be presented at the American College of Cardiology’s 68th Annual Scientific Session in New Orleans. They found that the group below 40 had more spontaneous coronary artery dissection -- a tear in the vessel wall, which tends to be more common in women, especially during pregnancy.

Good habits like avoiding tobacco, regular exercise, heart healthy diet, weight loss if required, managing blood pressure and cholesterol, controlling diabetes if required, and staying away from substance abuse need to be maintained for a good heart, Blankstein suggested.



Blood holds key to liver regeneration, study suggests

March 11, 2019/Hindustan Times

The liver is the only organ in the body that can regenerate. A recent study shows that the blood-clotting protein fibrinogen may hold the key as to why some patients who undergo a liver resection, a surgery that removes a diseased portion of the organ, end up needing a transplant because the renewal process doesn't work.

"We discovered that fibrinogen accumulates within the remaining liver quickly after surgery and tells platelets to act as first responders, triggering the earliest phase of regeneration. But if fibrinogen or platelets are inhibited, then regeneration is delayed," said James Luyendyk, lead author of the study published in the Journal Blood. Platelets are blood cells that help form clots and stop bleeding. When they receive information from fibrinogen, they go into action and accumulate in the remaining part of the liver to help restore it, increasing the chances of a fully functional liver and successful recovery. Using samples from patients undergoing liver resection and a comparable model in mice, Luyendyk and his team noticed that when fibrinogen was low, the number of platelets in the liver decreased.

"Measuring this protein in liver resection patients may help us determine in advance whether the organ will regenerate successfully or if it will become dysfunctional," she said. Researchers suggest that these findings could lead to new treatments that would help doctors correct low levels of the protein by using fibrinogen concentrates that can be administered during surgery.

E-cigarettes linked to higher risk of depression, poor heart

March 12, 2019/Hindustan Times

Using e-cigarettes can significantly raise the risk of depression, say researchers, including one of Indian-origin who found that switching to e-cigarettes does not eliminate health risks. The study, by a team from the University of Kansas in the US, showed that e-cigarette users were twice as likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other emotional problems. In addition, vaping was 56% more likely to lead to a heart attack and 30% more likely to lead to a stroke. It was also found to increase the risk of coronary artery disease and circulatory problems, including blood clots, by 10% and 44% respectively. "These data are a real wake-up call and should prompt more action and awareness about the dangers of e-cigarettes," said lead author Mohinder Vindhyal, Assistant Professor at the varsity. "Regardless of how frequently someone uses e-cigarettes, daily or just on some days, they are still more likely to have a heart attack or coronary artery disease," Vindhyal added.

The study, which involved 96,467 e-cigarette users from the US, also compared data for reported tobacco smokers and non-smokers. Traditional tobacco cigarette smokers were found to be more likely to have high blood pressure, diabetes, circulatory problems and depression or anxiety, according to the findings which will be presented at the American College of Cardiology's 68th Annual Scientific Session in New Orleans.

New optical imaging system to help find tiny tumours

March 12, 2019/Hindustan Times



An imaging system which could be deployed to find tiny tumours, as small as a couple of hundred cells, deep within the body has been developed by scientists, including those of Indian origin. The researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US used their imaging system, named “DOLPHIN,” which relies on near-infrared light, to track a 0.1-millimetre fluorescent probe through the digestive tract of a living mouse. They also showed that they can detect a signal to a tissue depth of eight centimeters, far deeper than any existing biomedical optical imaging technique. The researchers, including Neelkanth Bardhan, a postdoctoral fellow at MIT, and one of the lead authors of the study, hope to adapt their imaging technology for early diagnosis of ovarian and other cancers that are currently difficult to detect until late stages. “We want to be able to find cancer much earlier,” said Angela Belcher, a professor at MIT.

“Our goal is to find tiny tumours, and do so in a noninvasive way,” Belcher said in a statement. Depending on the choice of the doping element, each of these particles emits near-infrared fluorescent light of different wavelengths. Using algorithms that they developed, the researchers can analyse the data from the hyperspectral scan to identify the sources of fluorescent light of different wavelengths, which allows them to determine the location of a particular probe.

By further analysing light from narrower wavelength bands within the entire near-IR spectrum, the researchers can also determine the depth at which a probe is located. To demonstrate the potential usefulness of this system, the researchers tracked a 0.1-millimetre-sized cluster of fluorescent nanoparticles that was swallowed and then travelled through the digestive tract of a living mouse.

These probes could be modified so that they target and fluorescently label specific cancer cells.

“In terms of practical applications, this technique would allow us to non-invasively track a 0.1-millimetre-sized fluorescently-labelled tumour, which is a cluster of about a few hundred cells,” said Bardhan.

“To our knowledge, no one has been able to do this previously using optical imaging techniques,” he said.

Next flu pandemic is inevitable: WHO

March 13, 2019/The Times of India

Another flu pandemic is inevitable and the world must prepare for potential devastation, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has said, warning that the risks must not be underestimated. Launching on Monday its Global Influenza Strategy for 2019-2030, the world body said the next influenza pandemic "is a matter of when, not if". WHO's Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said it would be the biggest public health threat and potentially threaten millions of lives worldwide because of the rapid spread of viruses. "The threat is ever-present," he cautioned. Outlining the global strategy the WHO official said surveillance systems must be strengthened and better tools for prevention and containment of influenza virus should be developed, Xinhua news agency reported. Chief of Influenza Preparedness and Response at WHO, Ann Moen said improved vaccines that have longer lasting immunity were needed, as well as antivirals and better treatment for the disease. An estimated 1 billion people are infected with flu every year, leading to between 290,000 and 650,000 deaths, according to a WHO health report.

The last flu pandemic across the globe was caused by the H1N1 virus that spread around the world in 2009 and 2010. Studies found that at least one in five people worldwide were infected in 2009, and the death rate was 0.02 per cent.



Midday napping may be effective in lowering high blood pressure: Study

March 13, 2019/The Indian Express

Many studies have shown that exercise or diet control may prove to be an effective way to control high blood pressure. But a recent study revealed, and quite interestingly so, that a midday nap might just be what you need to keep it under check. The study also found that it might help a great deal in boosting your energy levels. The study was conducted by researchers at the Asklepion General Hospital in Voula, Greece.

“Midday sleep appears to lower blood pressure levels at the same magnitude as other lifestyle changes. For example, salt and alcohol reduction can bring blood pressure levels down by 3 to 5 [millimeters of mercury (mmHg)],” Dr. Manolis Kallistratos, one of the researchers of the study revealed.

To conduct the study, the researchers worked with 212 participants who had a mean blood pressure of 129.9 mm Hg. As per Medical News, “According to guidelines from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, a person has high blood pressure if their readings of systolic blood pressure (pressure during a heartbeat) are 140 mm Hg or higher, and their readings of diastolic blood pressure (pressure between heartbeats) are 90 mm Hg or higher. The participants were, on average, 62 years old, and close to one in four of them smoked, had a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes, or both.”

Novel method could improve LASIK eye surgery

March 13, 2019/The Tribune

Scientists have developed a new microscopy technique that could one day be used to improve laser vision correction, LASIK, and eliminate the “surgery” aspect of the procedure. When performed on both eyes, the entire procedure of LASIK surgery takes about 20 minutes and can rid patients of the need to wear glasses or contact lenses. While LASIK has a very high success rate, virtually every procedure involves an element of guesswork, according to the study published in the journal Physical Review Letters. This is because doctors have no way to precisely measure the refractive properties of the eye. Instead, they rely heavily on approximations that correlate with the patient’s vision acuity—how close to 20/20 he or she can see without the aid of glasses or contacts. Giuliano Scarcelli, an assistant professor with the University of Maryland in the US developed a microscopy technique that could allow doctors to perform LASIK using precise measurements of how the eye focuses light, instead of approximations. Researchers developed a microscopy technique that can measure the local refractive index using Brillouin spectroscopy—a light-scattering technology that was previously used to sense the mechanical properties of tissue and cells without disrupting or destroying either.

“We experimentally demonstrated that, by using a dual Brillouin scattering technology, we could determine the refractive index directly, while achieving three-dimensional spatial resolution,” Scarcelli said. “This means that we could measure the refractive index of cells and tissue at locations in the body—such as the eyes—that can only be accessed from one side,” he said.

World Kidney Day: How to prevent diabetic kidney disease

March 14, 2019/Hindustan Times

There are around 72 million people with diabetes in India and these numbers are expected to increase to 134 million in the next 10-15 years. Uncontrolled diabetes can affect many organs and the kidney is one of the most serious of these complications. On World Kidney Day, its time we start paying attention to this issue. After 15 to 20 years of having diabetes, nearly a third of people with the condition develop kidney complications. Diabetes mellitus is the most common cause of chronic kidney disease and kidney failure in the world. Therefore, it is essential that all clinicians understand how to appropriately screen patients for diabetic kidney disease with a focus on prevention of kidney diseases, and if is already present, to try to slow down its progression.

Stages of diabetic kidney disease

This first stage of diabetic kidney disease (DKD) is called microalbuminuria, and at this stage small amounts of albumin begin to leak into the urine. As the disease progresses larger quantities of albumin leak into the urine. This stage is called macroalbuminuria or proteinuria. Slowly the kidneys' filtering capacity begins to drop and the body begins to retain various waste products as filtration falls.

As kidney damage develops further, the blood pressure rises and this further damages the kidney. After months or years, the DKD may progress to end stage renal disease (ESRD), which requires either a kidney transplant or regular dialysis.

What should one do to prevent diabetic kidney disease (DKD)?

Blood glucose control

If the diabetes is detected early and treated aggressively, it is possible to prevent diabetic kidney disease in most patients. One must aim to keep the glycated haemoglobin (HbA1c) below 7% at all times.

Blood pressure control

It is ideal to keep the BP less than 130/80 mmHg or even at 120/70 mmHg, if there is already some evidence of kidney involvement.

Avoid nephrotoxic agents

It is important to avoid medicines that can affect the kidney eg., pain killers like NSAID drugs and certain antibiotics. Contrast dyes used for doing CT Scans can also affect the kidney.

One should also treat any urinary or bladder or kidney infections aggressively. Finally, one should drink enough water and keep oneself well hydrated.

Green tea may cut obesity risk, other health disorders

March 14, 2019/Hindustan Times

Green tea may reduce the risk of obesity and a number of inflammatory biomarkers linked with poor health, a study conducted in mice suggests. Mice fed a diet of 2% green tea extract fared far better than those that ate a diet without it, according to the study published in the Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry.

The finding has prompted an upcoming study of green tea's potential benefits in people at high risk of diabetes and heart disease. The benefits seen in the study appear to stem from improved gut health, including more beneficial microbes in the intestines of the mice and less permeability in the intestinal wall - a condition typically called "leaky gut" in people. "This study provides evidence that green tea encourages the growth of good gut bacteria, and that leads to a series of benefits that significantly lower the risk of obesity," said Richard Bruno, the study's lead author and a professor at The Ohio State University in the US.

Negative changes in the gut microbiome have been previously linked to obesity, and green tea has been shown to promote healthy bacteria. The team wanted to explore whether there was an argument for green tea preventing obesity, inflammation and other factors connected to poor metabolic health, Bruno said in a statement. The results of studies looking at obesity management so far have been a real mixed bag. The researchers also found that the green tea appeared to contribute to a healthier microbial community in the guts of the mice fed a high-fat diet. Mice fed the normal, or low-fat, diet supplemented with green tea also had benefits including reduced weight gain and lower endotoxin levels and markers of leaky gut, but these were relatively modest compared with the effects seen in mice fed the high-fat diet. Green tea consumption in the experiment would be equivalent to about 10 cups of green tea throughout the day for a person, Bruno said. "It might seem like a lot of tea, but it's not highly unusual in certain parts of the world," he said. Bruno is currently working on a human study that will explore the effects of green tea on leaky gut in people with metabolic syndrome - a condition that predisposes people to Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Why does breast cancer recur? New study finds clues

March 14, 2018/Hindustan Times

For breast cancer survivors, the risk of tumours returning casts a long shadow, with recurrence possible up to two decades after a diagnosis. But new research could help identify and treat those most in danger. Doctors have traditionally relied on factors such as the size and grade of a tumour at diagnosis, lymph node involvement and a patient's age to determine their risk of relapse. But the rate at which breast cancer recurs, and why it does so, remains "poorly understood", according to the study published Thursday in the journal Nature. In a bid to change that, the researchers turned to data from over 3,000 breast cancer patients diagnosed in the United Kingdom and Canada between 1977 and 2005. Nearly 2,000 of the cases included molecular data about the cancers that provided the researchers with detailed information about the tumours. The data was used to develop a computer model that identified four sub-groups with "exceedingly high risk of late distant relapse," said senior author Christina Curtis, assistant professor of medicine and genetics at Stanford University.

Vitamin D impacts the body and the brain

March 15, 2019/Deccan Chronicle

While vitamin D comes with a lot of benefits, one should know the right amount of intake of vitamin D.

According to a recent study, obese older women, who take more than three times the recommended daily dose of vitamin D showed improvements in memory and learning but also had slower reaction times. The researchers hypothesised that slower reaction times may increase the risk of falling among older people.

The results of the study were published in 'Journals of Gerontology: Series A'. The researchers used computers to assess the impact of vitamin D on cognitive function. They evaluated three groups of women between 50 and 70 years old in a randomised controlled trial. One group took the recommended daily dose of 600 international units (IU), equivalent to 15 micrograms, of vitamin D each day for a year. Another group took 2,000 IU per day and the third took 4,000. All women participated in lifestyle counselling and were encouraged to lose a modest amount of weight. The researchers found that memory and learning improved in the group that took 2,000 IU per day, but not in the group that took the higher dosage. Meanwhile, the women's reaction time showed a trend to be slower at 2,000 IU daily and was significantly slower at the higher dosage.

With regards,

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