The Heart Needs to Work Harder During the Winter Season

by Randy Collins

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The human heart is an amazing organ. It is the only pump that works tirelessly, round the clock with perfect precision. However, in order for it to carry out its set task by beating rhythmically and without a murmur (pun intended) the conditions need to be favorable. It is not just the condition of the human body that needs to be perfect, the climate needs to be ideal as well.

During cold winter months when the temperature drops considerably, and it gets miserably cold, the blood vessels get constricted. This in turn will restrict the supply of blood to the heart. Reduced blood supply could well result in angina and/or blockage in the arteries and lead to a heart attack. People with high risk factors like high blood pressure, high level of cholesterol in the blood need to watch out. Diabetics and heavy smokers also need to take extra care as they fall in the high-risk category as well. Obesity is directly related to the normal functioning of the heart hence even people who border on obesity need to put in extra effort to keep the weight down. When there is a family history of heart disease and people suffering from congenital heart defects should be vigilant during the winter months.

The oxygen requirement of the heart increases drastically during the cold season as it has to work harder to keep the body warm. There could be a sudden surge in blood pressure levels early in the mornings which again could lead to complications or even an attack for people who are already prone to it. Reduction in daylight hours and the subsequent mad rush to complete assigned tasks before dusk is a major contributory factor as well. This could actually result in a change in the circadian rhythm or body clock. Anxiety caused due to work pressure results in increased heart rate and blood pressure and cortisol levels in the blood.

It is advisable to prepare well for any such contingencies. Exercising would be very good for the heart; however people who are afflicted already need to take care to start up slowly as the cardiovascular system can only adapt to slow and progressive changes. Gentle warming to begin with would be ideal. It is preferable to exercise for short periods of about 15 minutes and take small breaks to let the body recover. It is advisable not to drink coffee or smoke a cigarette during any such breaks as the very purpose would get defeated. People who are starting on a regimen of exercise for the first time need to take it a bit easy.

The idea is to train and not strain. It is advisable to consult a doctor before embarking, more importantly if one has been leading a sedentary life for a long time. A well planned diet, preferably after consulting a qualified dietician, would go a long way in leading a healthy and comfortable life without any complications. Inclusion of green leafy vegetables and a generous quantity of salads should be made a part of our daily food intake. Yoga and meditation are known to have worked wonders for most people. Surveys have proved that junk foods have led to a steady increase in the percentage of obesity and chronic heart ailments. Diabetics are prone to heart ailments as they normally do not feel any pain when the heart is overburdened and never even realize that they are having a heart attack when they are actually having one. All the more important for us to take precautionary measures rather than going for extended periods of medication. Let us resolve to endeavor to lead a healthy and happy life.

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