

Metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease among South Asians

Recommendations you can start doing today

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I lost my dad to idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) when I was 16. He was only 52. IPF is “a chronic, progressive, parenchymal disease of the lung with a median survival of 3–5 years after diagnosis. ... IPF has been associated with various co-morbidities such as lung cancer, emphysema, obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), GERD and multiple cardiovascular consequences.” My dad was admitted into the hospital and passed away 30 days later.

Unfortunately my dad suffered two heart attacks in his 40's and was not a candidate for a lung transplant. South Asians have the highest prevalence of cardiovascular disease overall. A study comprised of over 5.8 million people in Canada between 1979 and 2007 concluded that people of South Asian descent are at a greater risk for heart disease such as angina, coronary artery bypass or stroke than Caucasians (5.7% to 10.0% vs. 5.4% to 5.7% respectively).

The study stated that coronary artery disease among South Asians men was 13% higher compared to Caucasians men (42% vs. 29% respectively). Conventional risk factors such as hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, diabetes and tobacco do not fully account for the high incidence of CAD among South Asians².

The Effect of Lifestyle on Metabolism

A condition known as metabolic syndrome, also called Syndrome X since it's a condition that affects an increasing number of Canadians that is a result of lifestyle habits that lead to an out-of-control metabolism and other serious illnesses like cardiovascular disease. Metabolic syndrome is not a disease itself, but rather a set of symptoms that occur at the same time which primarily include abdominal weight gain with high blood sugar, high blood pressure, high triglycerides and high cholesterol. Excess body fat and a sedentary lifestyle are two key factors.

If you are shaking your head in agreement or know someone who has one or some of the above symptoms or factors of metabolic syndrome then read on as I evaluate the typical Indian diet and where improvements can be made.

Diet is key

A traditional Punjabi meal like roti, dhal (lentil soup), sabzi (vegetable dish), dahi (yogurt), and salad or rice, chicken curry, and salad for example sound like healthy balanced meals if cooked with quality oils, organic vegetables, and organic, free-range, hormone free meats and milk.

The problem? Proportions. Roti and rice. The beloved staples of Indian, has a tendency to be eaten in excess. Instead of thinking of roti and rice as the staple where grains (carbohydrates) are the largest portion of your meal an easy recommendation is to swap out grains for larger servings of dhal, sabzi and fresh salad. You see, vegetables are a great carbohydrate too.

Vegetables are high in fiber and nutrient dense. Studies show that people who consume at least five to nine servings daily have a much lower risk of heart disease and high blood pressure. Since antioxidants and phytochemicals are so abundant in vegetables³.

Not all fats are created equal

Media and certain food guides have trained us to think that all fats are bad and should be blacklisted from our diets. Fats are essential for the production of hormones, healthy skin, body temperature production, and cell membranes. The importance of choosing the right fat cannot be overstated. Poor quality fats like shortening, margarine, fried foods contribute to inflammation and cardiovascular disease. Quality fats like flax seed oil, coconut oil, ghee, and butter contribute to health and vitality.

Regular exercise routine

A regular exercise routine helps take and keep off weight, increases energy, and improves circulation. You'll do best to combine, stretching, relaxation exercises, strength training, and cardio in an integrated program. A properly designed exercise program will include relaxation exercises to address stress, resistance training to strengthen muscle, stretching to resolve muscle tension patterns, and cardiovascular exercise to improve overall fitness.

The take home point is make it a part of your schedule, be consistent in your efforts and have fun doing it!

Soy not good for you

While many studies have claimed soy to offer cardio protective properties, it's quite actually a double edge sword one should avoid altogether. Soy consumption is linked to hormonal cancers, thyroid issues, impaired fertility, food allergies, and infant abnormalities.

Of course diet and exercise alone will not make you immune to cardiovascular disease. Micro-infections, heavy metal toxicity, hypothyroidism, environmental factors, and stress can deal a significant blow to your cardiovascular health.

Despite the statistics South Asians can improve their health and lifestyle to address metabolic syndrome and mitigate the risks of cardiovascular disease. For a complete assessment and protocol, including diet, exercise, supplementation recommendations speak to a nutritionist.

References

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