

- Cardiovascular diseases

Don't take heart health lightly even if you exercise regularly

Heart health can't be taken for granted, and regular health checks are a must

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Sajeev Kaura, Indian expatriate in Dubai and a senior business director with an international organisation, now 55, was only 41 when he suffered a heart attack. An extremely fit person with an ideal weight range, he ran five times a week, covering nearly 5-6km each day at an average speed of 10kmph and played golf every week.



Recounting his experience, Kaura said: “I was posted in Johannesburg, South Africa, then. This happened on a Sunday, while I was visiting a friend’s place for lunch. I suddenly felt a pain in my left arm that travelled to my back. I was sweating and was in discomfort, but thought the incident would pass off. But within a few minutes, I felt I had to visit the hospital.”

He was driven to the Emergency Room by his friend where the doctor diagnosed that he was in the midst of a heart attack. “I was taken aback as I had been keeping super fit and healthy and was only 41,” said Kaura, who bounced back after an angioplasty.

The reason why Kaura suffered a heart attack could possibly be attributed to his family history of heart disease and his habit of smoking, doctors said.

Since the incident, Kaura has given up smoking completely and has kept up with his fitness schedule. “I continue to run five times a week, play golf once a week and eat healthy. Two years ago, I ran the half marathon in Ras Al Khaimah. My weight has always been steady. The only thing that is different is that I am now regular with my health and heart check, once every six months. Being physically fit

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probably saved me when I had a heart attack, as my doctor said it could have been worse.”

What Kaura experienced is not an isolated case.

While doctors recognise an exercise regimen as the best ways to stay healthy, cardiologists say one has to determine how much is too much.

Dr Abdul Rahuman Aboobaker, consultant cardiologist at Thumbay Hospital, Fujairah, explained: “Regular physical exercise is one of the most important recommendations for keeping healthy, but very vigorous exercise can sometimes lead to a myocardial infarction [MI], arrhythmia and sudden death.

“The most important cause of exercise-related cardiac events is related to Coronary Artery Disease [CAD] or atherosclerosis. This involves blockage in the main arteries of the heart supplying oxygenated blood,” he said. “The precipitating factors could be a habit of smoking, physical or mental stress.”

Ajay Chaturvedi, a health sector personnel, qualified Basic Life Support (BLS) and trained to give advanced Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) in emergencies, said he had worked closely in cases where people had experienced a sudden irregular rhythm or heart attack.

He said: “Most individuals, who are young, never think they may have CVD and may ignore symptoms such as excessive sweating, nausea and dizziness. They presume it is due to heavy exercise or weightlifting, while it may actually be happening because they are experiencing a heart attack.”

Dr Aboobaker said: “More often, people who exercise irregularly and later do vigorous workouts to compensate for the missed period are the ones who face health challenges.”

Red flags

If you are exercising and experience any of the following symptoms, stop your workout immediately and seek medical help.

Heaviness, chest pain, breathing difficulties, unusual sweating, dizziness, lightheadedness and heart rhythm abnormalities are red flags.

Anybody who plans to follow an exercise programme and is above 40 years, ideally should have consultation with his or her doctor, Dr Aboobaker advised.

Dr Naeem Tareen, a leading cardiologist in the UAE, said those who are active in sports must also be conscious of their heart health.

An American Board certified cardiologist and fellow at American College of Cardiology and chief of American Heart Centre at the Dubai Healthcare City, Dr Tareen said that even professional sports persons tend to lose fitness once they are out of active sports and can end up suffering heart ailments.

“My message is that, everyone, including athletes and cricketers, should have regular check-ups and have electrocardiography stress test echocardiograms and lipid profiles done apart from following a healthy lifestyle.”

He added: “I advise my patients to walk daily. Everybody should have annual health check-ups.”

Sajeev Kaura | Senior business director with an international firm