
Poor Diet Top Contributor to Heart Disease Deaths



According to findings published in the European Heart Journal, over two-thirds of deaths from heart disease worldwide could be prevented with healthier diets. These findings, released on World Heart Day, highlight the importance of healthy eating.

Study authors report that the top three contributors to deaths from heart attacks and angina include unhealthy diets, high blood pressure and high serum cholesterol. These findings were consistent in both developed and developing countries. The authors point out that nearly six million deaths could be prevented by simply reducing the intake of processed foods, sugary beverages, trans and saturated fats, and added salt and sugar. People should switch to healthier options which could include fish, fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains. It is recommended that people should eat 200 to 300 mg of omega 3 fatty acids from seafood each day and should also consume 200 to 300 grams of fruit, 290 to 430 grams of vegetables, 16 to 25 grams of nuts, and 100 to 150 grams of whole grains.

In this study, researchers analysed data from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017, conducted in 195 countries between 1990 and 2017. There were 126.5 million people living with ischaemic heart disease in 2017. There were 10.6 million new diagnoses during the same time. 8.9 million deaths in 2017 (16% of all deaths) were caused by ischaemic heart disease compared to 12.6% of all deaths in 1990, indicating the significant increase in prevalence of this disease. Even though age-standardised prevalence, incidence, and death rates per 100,000 people decreased by 11.8%, 27.4%, and 30%, respectively between 1990 and 2017, absolute numbers have almost doubled. Hence, it is clear that despite progress in preventing heart disease, the number of people affected by it continue to increase.

The impact of 11 risk factors was evaluated by the investigators. These include diet, high blood pressure, high serum LDL cholesterol, high plasma glucose, tobacco use, high BMI, air pollution, low physical activity, impaired kidney function, lead exposure, and alcohol use. The proportion of deaths that could potentially be prevented by eliminating that risk factor was also estimated.

Findings show that approximately 69.2% of ischaemic heart disease deaths worldwide could be prevented if more people adopted healthier diets. 54.4% of these deaths could be avoided if systolic blood pressure was kept at 110–115 mmHg, and 41.9% of deaths could be stopped if serum LDL was kept at 0.7–1.3 mmol/L. 25.5% of deaths could be prevented if serum fasting plasma glucose was kept at 4.8–5.4 mmol/L and 20.6% deaths could be prevented by eradicating smoking and second-hand smoke. 18.3% of deaths could be prevented if BMI was kept at 20–25 kg/m².

"Ischaemic heart disease is largely preventable with healthy behaviours and individuals should take the initiative to improve their habits. In addition, geographically tailored strategies are needed – for example, programmes to reduce salt intake may have the greatest benefit in regions where consumption is high (e.g. China or central Asia)," says study author Dr. Xinyao Liu of Central South University, Changsha, China.

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