Fatty liver can lead to liver cancer in the long run

It is important to follow a healthy diet free of alcohol to prevent build-up of fat in the liver

New Delhi, 16 August 2017: Studies indicate an alarming increase in the number of people suffering from fatty liver. As per available statistics, 1 in 5 people in India have excess fat in their liver and 1 in 10 have fatty liver disease. This is a cause of concern as fatty liver can lead to liver damage and even liver cancer if undiagnosed and untreated. As per the IMA, about 20% of those with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) are likely to get liver cirrhosis in 20 years. This percentage is akin to that among alcoholics.

NAFLD is caused due to a build-up of fat in liver cells. The first stage of this disease is called simple fatty liver. Although excess fat builds up in the liver in this stage, it remains harmless and has no evident symptoms unless it develops into inflammation or damage. The second stage is called non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) which is similar to alcoholic liver disease. However, those affected drink little or no alcohol.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, “NAFLD may progress to cirrhosis and is likely an important cause of cryptogenic cirrhosis. As little as two drinks per day in those who are overweight (and one drink per day in those who are obese) is associated in hepatic injury. Liver cancer is associated with cirrhosis due to NAFLD and heart disease is the most common cause of death among patients with this condition. NAFLD is not caused by alcohol but its consumption can make the condition worse. The disease can stop or reverse, especially in the early stages. Once it progresses to cirrhosis, the liver becomes unable to function causing symptoms like fluid retention, muscle wasting, internal bleeding, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), liver failure.”

Some symptoms of NAFLD that emerge in the long run include fatigue, weight loss or loss of appetite, weakness, nausea, confusion and impaired judgment, pain in the centre or right upper part of the abdomen below the ribs, an enlarged liver, and patchy or dark skin on the neck or underarm.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “NAFLD is often diagnosed after liver function tests produce an abnormal result and other liver conditions such as hepatitis are ruled out. However, NAFLD can be
present even when routine liver blood tests are normal. One needs to make certain lifestyle changes to prevent the disease from progressing to a more serious stage and lower the risk of having a heart attack or stroke.”

Here are some simple lifestyle changes one can make to avoid this condition.

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Consume a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables.
- Get minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity every day.
- Limit alcohol intake or avoid consuming it at all.
- Only take medicines that are required and follow dosage recommendations.

About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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