Lifestyle and unhealthy eating to be blamed for colon cancer, says IMA

This cancer can be prevented by timely screening and a change in lifestyle

New Delhi, 12 July 2017: Statistics indicate that colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer across the world accounting for about 1.4 million new cases and 6,94,000 deaths per year. Its incidence is also on the rise in India. About one in three cases of colorectal cancers are found to be localized in the rectum. According to the IMA, a high-fat and low-fibre diet increases the risk of colorectal cancer.

Colorectal cancer can take years to develop. What is initially a polyp, turns into cancer over time. The tumor eventually invades through different layers of the bowel wall and then to the lymph nodes nearby. If undetected, the cancer can even spread to different parts of the body.

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, "Colon cancer cases are being seen in the younger population as well today. Sedentary lifestyles, desk jobs, and unhealthy eating patterns are all major contributors. What is more is that due to low levels of awareness, about 40% to 50% of the cases come to light only after they have reached the advanced stages. Most often, the symptoms appear only after the cancer has begun to grow. Signs such as rectal bleeding, constipation, and diarrhea lasting longer than one or two days can be mistaken as symptoms of other ailments. This delays diagnosis as well. Prevention of this cancer is largely in the hands of an individual. The original Indian meal was high in fibre and therefore supported the digestive system. Western diet being more preservative-laden and low on fibre causes not only colon cancer but a host of other diseases."

While some symptoms may seem common to other diseases, it is important to see a doctor if they persist. Some such symptoms include diarrhea or constipation since more than two weeks, blood or mucous in stool, pencil stools or a feeling of being unable to empty your bowels completely, anemia, abdominal swelling or persistent abdominal pain or discomfort, unexplained weight loss, extreme tiredness, or a dizzy feeling, flatulence, and vomiting.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "This is one form of cancer where only awareness can help. Timely screening can help in detection of precancerous polyp which then can be removed before
they turn into cancerous cells. Cancers confined within the wall of the colon can be cured with the help of surgery. With modern technology, less than 5% of all colorectal cancer patients require a colostomy. This is the surgical construction of an artificial excretory opening from the colon."

It is possible to avert any possible risks for colon cancer by taking the following steps.

- Eat a lot of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These not only contain vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, but also plenty of fibre, which can play a major role in preventing cancer.
- Drink in moderation and limit the amount of alcohol to no more than one drink a day for women and two for men.
- Stop smoking and speak to your doctor about how to quit this habit.
- Get about 30 minutes of exercise every day.
- Maintain a healthy weight and for those who already have a healthy weight, it is a good idea to maintain the same by working out and eating healthy.

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**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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