Press Release

Gut microbiome may hold the key to predicting PTSD

PTSD is one of the many serious mental health conditions affecting the Indian population

New Delhi, 30 October 2017: A recent study has indicated that gut bacteria can help predict the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after experiencing a life-threatening trauma. Microbes in the gut microbiome have an important role to play in metabolizing food and medicine, as also fighting infections. Studies have now found that the gut microbiome also influences the brain and brain function. This is possible by the production of neurotransmitters/hormones, immune-regulating molecules and bacterial toxins.¹

Statistics indicate that about 13.7% of India's general population suffers from a variety of mental illnesses, one of which is PTSD. Of these, 10.6% need immediate medical intervention.² PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it.

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, “The symptoms of PTSD may start within a month of some traumatic event. However, many a time, these may not be evident until after a year. PTSD can impact a person’s social, personal, and professional life alike. It can also interfere with their ability to do normal daily tasks. Although PTSD has been traditionally regarded as a psychological disorder, studies now indicate that it should be considered a systemic disorder and not just a psychological disorder. This is because, this condition is associated with several comorbidities independent of exposure to trauma. Most people going through traumatic events may have temporary difficulty adjusting and coping. However, with time and good self-care, they usually get better.”

The symptoms of this condition are generally grouped into four categories: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions. These can vary with time and from person to person.

¹ Study carried out in the Stellenbosch University, South Africa in collaboration with University of Colorado Boulder
² Study conducted by NIMHANS
Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “If left untreated, PTSD can put a person at the risk for developing other health problems such as depression, eating disorders, drug or alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts, and cardiovascular diseases. If diagnosed in time, this condition and its symptoms can be managed well with a combination of psychotherapy and medication. It is also important to reach out to people or join support groups which can offer counselling and therapy.”

Some tips for those with PTSD to help manage the condition and symptoms include the following.

- Stay connected with family, friends or someone with whom you can share how you feel. Spending time with loved ones can bring solace and help in healing.
- If you feel you cannot talk to family or friends, it is a good idea to approach a psychologist who can understand your problem and give some coping tips.
- Some form of physical activity everyday can help in distracting you from disturbing emotions and increase feelings of being in control again.
- In addition to physical activity, make sure you consume a balanced diet, read, listen to music, take up a new hobby, or indulge in an activity that is of your interest.
- Ensure that you do not self-medicate. Alcohol or drugs can make the problem worse. It is also a good idea to avoid caffeine and nicotine, which can worsen anxiety.
- Turn to techniques such as yoga and meditation which will help you cope with stress.

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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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