Heart attack or a Sudden Cardiac Arrest: Know the difference

Heart attack and cardiac arrest are terms that are often used interchangeably but they are not the same.

Awareness needs to be created about the difference between these two conditions

New Delhi, 06th Nov, 2016: Heart diseases are the number cause of morbidity and premature mortality in India. Heart attack and sudden cardiac death account for the most numbers of mortality. The two conditions greatly differ in pathology and hence warrant different care and management methods.

A heart attack is a problem of the circulatory system whereas a sudden cardiac death is an abnormality in the electrical conduction in the heart. However, their risk factors are common and include a high-cholesterol diet, sedentary lifestyle, lack of physical exercise, obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Padma Shri Awardee Dr. KK Aggarwal - President HCFI and National President Elect IMA, said that, “These two heart conditions have different causes, different symptoms and affect the body in different ways. A heart attack occurs when there is a blockage in the blood flow to the heart while a cardiac arrest is triggered by an electrical disturbance in the heart that results in arrhythmia or irregular heart beat. Both of these conditions are fatal and require prompt action. Symptoms can be used for differential diagnosis, symptoms of heart attack include tightness or discomfort in chest, shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting; while in a cardiac arrest, the symptoms are sudden collapse, loss of breathing, pulse and consciousness. Cardiac arrests are highly fatal and usually occur without warning, death can occur within minutes if medical attention is delayed.”

There is a connecting link between these two conditions. Sudden cardiac arrest can occur after a heart attack, or during the recovery period. Heart attacks can increase the risk of cardiac arrest however, heart attacks do not lead to sudden cardiac arrest but when sudden cardiac arrest occurs, heart attack is the most common cause.

Talking further about the issue, Dr. K.K Aggarwal added, “Even if you are not sure whether it is a heart attack or a sudden cardiac arrest, call for medical help as soon as possible. For both the conditions, every minute is precious. For cardiac arrest, the medical professional will resynchronize the electrical conduction of heart using a defibrillator; CPR is extremely helpful until medical help arrives. For heart attack, patients who reach hospital as soon as chest discomfort sets in have a significantly high chance of survival. “

The risk of heart attack can be reduced by controlling the risk factors, a heart healthy diet comprising of generous sources of fibers and antioxidants, smoking cessation, reduced alcohol,
salt and sugar consumption, controlling hypertension and adequate amounts of physical activity are within our control. However, cardiac arrest stems from electrical issues in heart that are beyond our control but following a general heart healthy lifestyle is known to reduce future risk.

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About Heart Care Foundation of India

Initiated in 1986, the Heart Care Foundation of India is a leading National NGO working in the field of creating mass health awareness among people from all walks of life and providing solutions for India's everyday healthcare needs. The NGO uses consumer-based entertainment modules to impart health education and increase awareness amongst people. A leading example of this is the Perfect Health Mela; an annual event started in 1993 that is attended by over 2-3 lakh people each year. The Mela showcases activities across categories such as health education seminars and check-ups, entertainment programs, lifestyle exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and competitions. In addition to this, the NGO conducts programs and camps to train people on the technique of hands only CPR through its CPR 10 mantra for revival after a sudden cardiac arrest. They currently hold three Limca book of world records for the maximum number of people trained in hands-only CPR in one go. Keeping article 21 of the Indian Constitution in mind, which guarantees a person Right to Life, Heart Care Foundation of India has also recently initiated a project called the Sameer Malik Heart Care Foundation Fund to ensure that no one dies of a heart disease just because they cannot afford treatment.

For more information, please contact

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