

Your Body Speaks The Language You Hide

Dr Roshan Jain



Lifestyle diseases are a clear and present problem today. It seems absurd but true that we suffer from ailments borne from the life choices we make. Indeed, lifestyle factors like over eating or under eating, chewing and smoking tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as lack of exercise, are thought to influence our susceptibility to many diseases, especially later in life.

Insomnia, obesity, hypertension, asthma/ breathing problems, heart attacks, diabetes, stress related conditions like anxiety and depression, and even cancer figure in a quick run of lifestyle diseases.

Take A Reality Check

- ◆ Stress levels in our community are directly proportional to the increasing demands on individuals.
- ◆ Mental stress is becoming a bigger problem than physical exertion.
- ◆ Nearly 75 per cent of adult visits to family physicians are for stress related problems.
- ◆ Unhealthy eating habits and erratic work hours have made obesity a big problem.
- ◆ There is a major shift in the disease pattern in the country vis-à-vis communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- ◆ Lifestyle diseases like diabetes and hypertension kill more Indians than any communicable diseases/infections.
- ◆ Indians are taking to alcohol at a much younger age. The average age of initiation of alcohol intake is now 13 years, from the previous 19 years.

What Is Behind Lifestyle Diseases?

We live an automated fast paced materialistic life without adequate time for reasoning, introspection and harmonization. Being in a competitive, striving mode, we find solace by indulging in excesses, whether it's the food we eat or the hours we work. Many of us exhibit a behavioural pattern called 'action-emotion-complex', wherein individuals are engaged in relentless struggle to obtain an unlimited

number of ill-defined things from their environment in the shortest period of time, and if necessary, against opposing effort of other things or persons in this same environment. Result is heightened stress – a psychological and physical reaction to demands of life.

Reports of stress are at an all time high. Stress is unavoidable, and indeed increased stress results in increased productivity – up to a point, after which things go to rapid decline. You need to be sensitive to the early warning signs that suggest a stress overload. Not infrequently, others are aware that you may be headed for trouble before you are.

Psychosomatic Aspects Of Lifestyle Diseases

We are a people who don't easily emote. In other words, we find it hard to express how we feel. We bottle up our feelings and disallow the manifestation of emotional problems. Cultural and societal factors, as well as the stigma associated with psychiatric difficulties are behind it. Drowning one's sorrow in alcohol is an age-old coping strategy across cultures. Unsurprisingly then, these feelings or emotions emerge as bodily symptoms, popularly known as somatisation or psychosomatic manifestations.

Psychosomatic is the word that combines the word mind (psyche) and body (soma). When this is associated with an illness, it simply means physical or bodily manifestation of an emotional or a psychological state.

For example, anxiety which is secondary to stress will present with a wide array of physical symptoms such a headache, dizziness, nausea/vomiting, dry mouth, racing heartbeat, chest tightness/pain and breathing difficulty. These features at the outset would suggest a heart problem!

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depression after diagnosis of cancer and after a heart attack. It presents primarily as aches and pain, tiredness and insomnia.

Panic attack will present with breathing difficulties and a feeling of lump in the throat.



7 Tips For Lifestyle Changes

Change in lifestyle cannot happen overnight. A good starting point is commitment for change, discipline and reviewing progress. Here are seven simple tools to help you.

- ◆ Restore work life balance: We are all over-worked; many feel under-appreciated, and have little time for meaningful activity and interest. Draw a distinction between work and life, and never carry work home! Spend quality time with yourself and family.
- ◆ Prioritisation: You can't get everything done in one day and there are only 24 hours in a day! Accept it. Manage time effectively and prioritise habitually.
- ◆ Learn to say 'NO': It's almost stigmatizing to decline work. Sometimes it is better to even risk it.
- ◆ Slow down: Life is too short. Take time to stop and enjoy things around you. Distance yourself from things that are causing you stress.
- ◆ Yoga & meditation: These are time tested and proven to be effective in reducing stress and improving general physical/ emotional well being. Exercise regularly. It is proven to reduce stress and improve resilience.
- ◆ Healthy diet: Avoid skipping meals. Timely food and good digestion equates with healthy body and healthy mind.
- ◆ Avoid alcohol: As we have often said in these pages before, it is one of the most toxic substances known to man, yet sold legally!