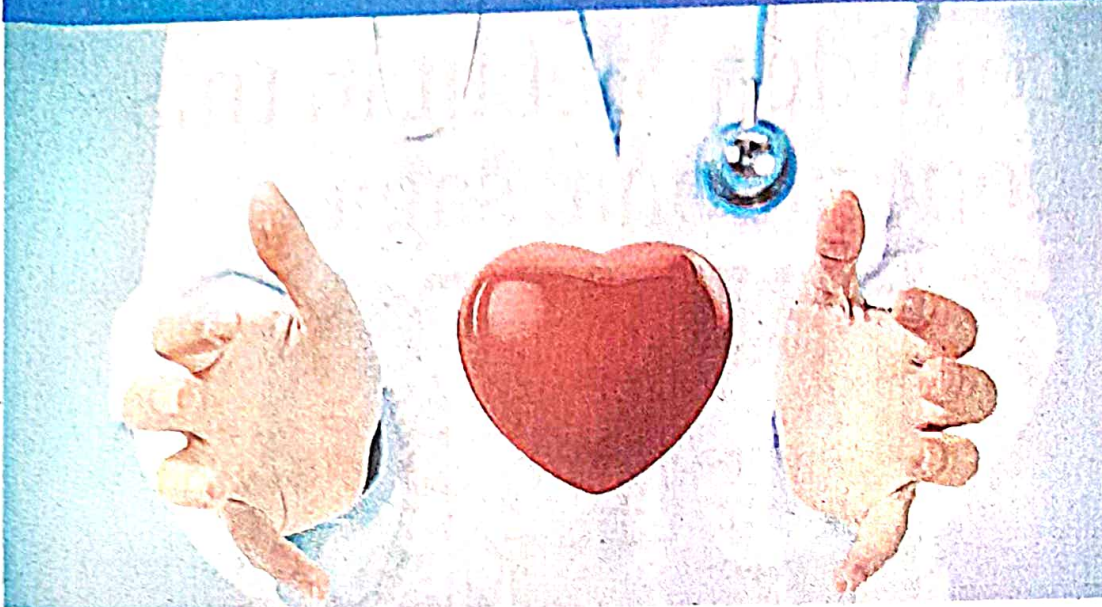


Heart failure: A silent surge



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Hear failure (HF) is a condition in which the heart is unable to pump enough blood to meet the needs of the body. In addition, the heart muscle may not relax properly to accommodate the flow of blood. These abnormalities in heart function can cause fluid accumulation in lungs and in other parts of the body, such as the legs and abdomen. The estimated prevalence of HF in India is about 1% of the population. In India, patients with heart failure are younger than in western countries, and it remains one of the most important causes of hospital admission.

SYMPTOMS OF HEART FAILURE

The common symptoms of heart failure include easy fatigability, early exhaustion, breathlessness during walking that worsens as the condition progresses, breathlessness when lying down, swollen ankles and abdomen, along with palpitations and an irregular pulse.

Chronic lung and kidney diseases, anaemia, thyroid disease, and alcohol abuse are also important risk factors for heart failure. Sometimes, swelling on heart muscles during pregnancy or viral infection can also lead to heart failure. Certain medicines used in cancer chemotherapy can cause heart failure as well.

DIAGNOSIS AND MANAGEMENT

Echocardiography is an important test that helps in early detection of heart pumping capacity and valve disease. Holter monitoring to detect abnormal heartbeats and coronary angiography to detect blockage in the arteries are initial tests. Some cases require cardiac MRI to detect heart muscle abnormalities.

Regular medical screening and medications that control blood pressure, heart rhythm, and cholesterol levels are effective in preventing heart failure in the large number of people who have conditions such as high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, kidney disease, and diabetes. Timely

surgery for damaged heart valves and angioplasty to restore blood flow to coronary arteries prevent heart failure in people who have valve disorders or blocked arteries. We also advise periodic heart function monitoring during cancer chemotherapy to detect heart failure early.

A multidisciplinary team approach is especially required to manage heart failure. Various effective medicines are now available that can keep symptoms under control and improve the pumping of the heart. Advanced pacemaker devices are available to correct abnormal heart rhythms and support weakened heart muscle. Cardiac Resynchronisation Therapy (CRT) is a form of advanced pacemaker where three wires are positioned in three chambers of the heart. It improves the heart's efficiency, and alleviates heart failure symptoms. It can also provide electric shock for abnormal heartbeat episodes and avert sudden cardiac arrest. Ventricular assist

devices (artificial hearts) and heart transplants are reserved for cases that are refractory to other modality of treatment.

PREVENTION

The incidence of heart failure is increasing as individuals with damaged hearts are living longer, making them more prone to developing the condition. Raising awareness about the importance of timely prevention and management is essential. Nowadays, effective medical treatments are available, and under the guidance of experienced clinicians, they can significantly improve heart function and quality of life. With early diagnosis, lifestyle changes, appropriate treatments and regular medical follow-ups, heart failure patients can lead active lives.

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