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The pace of life, our routines and even manner of working have all changed drastically in the past two decades. The main reason for this is the result of technological inventions which have become available to the common man at an affordable cost, such as mobile phones, computers and internet connection, in addition to a host of electrical gadgets to make housekeeping and household chores like cooking and heating much faster and easier. These advances have made information more accessible to everyone and helped reduce the time taken to accomplish many tasks. They have also made communication much faster. Where we once had to go physically to fulfill certain actions, we can now use technology to accomplish the same in a fraction of the time. Social media, has, to a large extent, replaced real time social activities. These factors have resulted in a slow and steady change in our life styles and priorities.

Some of these changes in our daily living have impacted our habits and our health, leading to what is now categorized broadly as Life Style Disorders. Common among these are Hypertension, Heart Disease, Respiratory conditions, elevated levels of Cholesterol in the blood, Type 2 Diabetes, Obesity, eye-related issues due to long hours of exposure to a lit screen and some Gastro Intestinal disorders, to name a few.

Much of manual labour has been replaced by machines and life, for the majority, is far more sedentary. This is especially the case for those with white collar jobs living in urban areas. Less physical activity can easily lead to obesity, which is now becoming a major cause of concern in urban India. The influx of rural population to urban areas to seek more employment opportunities is causing real estate costs in these cities and towns to escalate and get more congested. Hence, there are fewer playgrounds nearby and often no footpaths and tracks for walking and running. This has led to gradual obesity in the general population impacting the health and wellbeing of many individuals. The bones together with the muscles are responsible for bearing the weight of the body. When the weight increases, the bones and muscles are strained and tire more easily, leading to fatigue and posture problems. Obesity, when unchecked, also increases the chances of Heart Disease and hormonal imbalances.

# LIFE STYLE DISORDERS



Hypertension or High Blood Pressure is caused due to an increase in the pressure with which blood flows through its pipeline, the blood vessels. A high salt diet with lack of exercise, obesity, sedentary life style, smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages, can lead to it. A modification in the life style, incorporating regular exercise, reduced salt intake, a healthy high fibre diet and avoiding tobacco products and alcohol, all play a crucial role in preventing a rise in blood pressure.

High Blood pressure, over time, especially if untreated, increases the work load of the heart which needs to pump the blood through its vessels to the entire body, with greater force and effort. This increased work load causes the heart to gradually increase in size and tire more easily leading to slow heart failure. Thus, High Blood Pressure must be treated while also incorporating life style changes. Once changes are made in one's exercise and diet regimen, medications for heart disease and high blood pressure can often be reduced or even stopped.

Another prevalent life style disorder is Type 2 Diabetes. The Pancreas is an organ situated in the abdominal cavity below the stomach. It produces a hormone called Insulin which regulates the blood sugar by helping the glucose to move from the bloodstream to the cells and provide energy. In Diabetes, the insulin production does not meet the insulin demand of the body and the blood sugar levels increase. Despite increased blood sugar levels, the cells do not receive the glucose they need due to inefficiency in the movement of the glucose in the blood stream to the cells. This faulty metabolism is the cause of the problem in Diabetes. Insufficient glucose in the cell results in reduced energy levels causing varying degrees of fatigue. Over a period of time, fatigue leads to reduced physical

activity and gain in weight. The higher glucose levels in the blood also attract infections, especially of the skin and urinary and respiratory tracts. Uncontrolled Diabetes escalates infections in the body and can eventually lead to decreased functioning or even failure of an organ or, in the case of skin, to ulceration and gangrene, necessitating amputation of the area involved. Adhering to strict dietary provisions along with medication and life style changes, go a long way in preventing complications and opportunistic infections. The blood vessels in the eye may get affected in cases of severe or untreated Diabetes causing a condition called Diabetic Retinopathy which can impact the vision eventually. The Nerves in the body also get affected by long standing high levels of sugar in the blood and can manifest as Neurological impairment. There is hardly a part of the body that completely escapes damage from Diabetes. Hence, it is of paramount importance to take medical advice once Diabetes is diagnosed. Mild rise of blood sugar levels may be controlled by a strict diet and exercise regimen but regular medical supervision and monitoring are necessary. Even in cases where medication is advised, regular monitoring of the state of blood sugar control and periodic investigations are necessary to detect and treat complications, should they arise.

Modern life style seems to have impaired our digestive powers to some degree. This is because of more packaged food and ready made products that we consume to save time and effort in cooking from scratch. To increase shelf life of ready to eat food products preservatives are added to food and certain artificial colours and flavours are also used to make the food look more appetizing. Many of these additives, when consumed regularly, decrease the ability to digest food leading to digestive disorders such as hyperacidity, flatulence and bowel irregularities. These readymade foods also contain more salt and fat which adversely affect our Blood Pressure and Heart. Refined and ultra-refined flour and grains are often used for many packaged food products. These cause one to gain weight easily. Trans fats are produced by partial hydrogenation of certain oils and these are mainly used in packaged food products as they have longer shelf lives. Many of the readymade snacks we consume have more sodium (table salt) and are fried and the left over oil is reused. Reused oil converts to trans fats. These Trans fats increase cholesterol levels in our blood and may form plaques which may, over time, clog the blood vessels which supply blood to the heart and lead to heart attacks. Given the fact that younger and younger people are now getting heart attacks, it is crucial for us to ensure that we avoid or at least restrict the consumption of packaged food stuffs

Smoking or using of Nicotine in any form is addictive and its long-term effects on the human body are well documented. It causes respiratory infections leading

to a host of problems from frequent episodes of cough to chronic lung disease and cancer, not just in the respiratory tract but in other organs of the body as well. Chewing of tobacco is known to cause ulceration and cancer of the mouth and tongue. Some of these cancers are very invasive and painful and despite treatment, patients ultimately die within a few years of diagnosis.

The functioning of the human body depends to a large extent on the life style of the individual. It is therefore up to each one of us to understand the advantages of a healthy life style and to ensure we incorporate changes in our lives to ensure optimum benefit to our bodies. This requires discipline and will power.

Computers and laptops have become necessary for school children, as also to office goers and self-employed persons. Digital communications are now widely used. Screens and monitors have replaced pen and paper. The result has been detrimental to the eyes. Eye strain, visual disturbances due to long hours of lit screen viewing can cause watering of the eyes, frequent headaches and even deterioration of eyesight.

Long hours of sitting at a desk in front of a monitor eventually leads to weight gain due to lack of physical activity. Earlier, even office goers would frequently get up from their seats to submit work or meet for discussions. This has been substituted by sending emails and doing online conferences. Many work stations now come with desks which can be elevated to allow for working while standing. Changes in posture thus necessitated allow better blood circulation. While working on a computer, one must take a few minutes of break every 30 to 40 minutes to allow the eyes to rest and straighten their backs by standing / walking.

Artificial Intelligence is the latest addition to our already fast paced life and unless we learn to keep this digital tool under our command, we may become slaves of the very asset which is now a boon. When information is too freely available, the mind becomes lazy in seeking its own answers. Natural curiosity gets replaced by the convenience of readily accessible solutions. Over time, this leads to a decline in the ability of the mind to think, reason out, imagine, innovate and create. Rapid changes in outlook and life style require enhanced capabilities to adapt. This in itself can pose challenges to one's frame of mind and psychological wellbeing. All these factors must be kept in mind when we adopt new techniques, new gadgets and new horizons of physical comfort. A balanced mind and body are necessary to embrace new technologies while one remains grounded and does not allow oneself to fully depend on factors beyond one's own capabilities, to dictate one's life and choices.