

How Old Is Your Heart

I often joke with my younger Kannada Koota friends that I may be old, but I am young at heart. This may not be true, but the analogy may have some truth. If your heart is aging faster than you are, you may be at increased risk for heart attack, stroke, or other cardiovascular events. I will try to explain to you how you can lower the risk.

Some of this information is obtained from a course I attended from Cleveland Clinic sometime ago. If you are an adult, there is a good chance that your heart is aging faster than your chronological age.

Older heart increases your likelihood of fatal or non-fatal heart attack, stroke, and other vascular events at an earlier age. Aging heart has bigger chambers, thicker and stiffer walls, calcified arteries and valves and fatty plaques that can limit the blood flow through the arteries.

This process is called remodeling and is often related to daily lifestyle habits that cause the heart to age prematurely. Adults with cardiovascular risk factors or family history should especially be careful of the role of their daily habits in their heart health.

There was a study done in 2019 in the greater New York area, involving over 6000 adults between the ages of 30 and 74. Researchers use the Framingham risk scoring system to calculate the 10-year cardiovascular risk profile. Average heart was 5.7 years older than the person's chronological age.

Having an aging heart is not the end of the world. Changing harmful habits can slow, stop or reverse that aging process. Seven tips for staying young at heart: 1 Be Active-exercise increases your heart's pumping power and helps to deliver oxygen throughout your body. It also changes your body chemistry by releasing endorphins, which make you feel good.

Regular exercise will help to keep your blood pressure and weight under control and improve the quality of your sleep. 2. Maintain Healthy weight-connection between obesity and heart disease is well established. Restricting your caloric intake can help you live longer, so long as you are appropriately nourished. 3. Eat a healthy diet.-avoid processed foods,fad diets.

A balanced diet, such as Mediterranean diet has been known to induce weight, loss and lower body mass index, blood pressure control, reducing fasting, blood sugar, total cholesterol, and markers of inflammation, all of these can reduce Cardiovascular risk. Limit use of salt.

Focus on eating whole, unprocessed foods, including plenty of fruits and vegetables, which are high in fiber, water and nutrients but low on calories . Try to incorporate plant proteins like beans, nuts, and seeds. 4. Avoid Toxins -Avoid smoking, including vaping, avoid secondhand smoke. Limit or eliminate alcohol and foods with added sugar. 5.

Keep your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar in normal range. 6. Get enough good quality sleep.-too much sleep, too little sleep, or sleep that is frequently interrupted can trigger inflammation in the body, which can contribute to coronary disease.

Poor sleep can lead to poor blood pressure control even when appropriate blood pressure medications are being taken for optimal cardiovascular health. Adults should aim for 7 to 9 hours of good quality sleep. Anxiety,depression, loneliness, and other emotional factors can influence the sleep.

Taking steps to manage these risk factors can have a positive effect on sleep, weight, and overall health. Observe your partner's sleep habits. Excessive snoring, stop breathing for a brief period in the middle of the night, restless legs, excessive daytime sleepiness, and tiredness may suggest sleep apnea and this may need to be tested with sleep study.

Sleep apnea needed to diagnosed and treated to prevent future cardiovascular problems. 7. Get a check up, which should include a cardiac risk profile-Heart attack used to be associated with older adults, but no longer .One in every five heart attacks now occurs in someone under the age of 40.

In young women heart disease can be due to pregnancy related complications such as pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes, or pregnancy induced hypertension, which are independent risk factors for cardiovascular disease. That's why it is unwise to wait until you become very ill or have health crisis to establish relationship with a physician.

Be patient. It takes years to develop cardiovascular disease, but every step you take towards lowering your cardiovascular risk will bring the age of your heart closer to your chronological age. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts . Living a heart healthy life is a hard work, but making a few simple changes to your daily habits will pay a big dividend.

Dr Keshava Aithal

ಐಐಐ 8 Double o