

Liver diseases on rise in Kerala, health experts seek shift in lifestyle

Urge regular checkups as symptoms appear at an advanced stage



KOCHI: The increased prevalence of liver diseases among the population in the state is a worrying trend and health experts have advised that it is high time that people change their lifestyle and diet, among other things, to reverse the course.

Liver diseases can occur from unhealthy lifestyles and habits, alcohol consumption, etc. Yet there is a misconception that they are caused majorly by alcohol

consumption, say doctors. The recent death of media personality Subi Suresh, from a liver ailment, has only made society's vulnerability a further talking point.

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, which is prevalent among Keralities, occurs primarily due to unhealthy diet and lifestyle. A recent population-based study 'Trivandrum non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) cohort', where data were collected from all inhabitants over the age of 25 of randomly selected households in Thiruvananthapuram, found that the prevalence of NAFLD among Keralites is around 50%, which is one in two people, higher than the national average.

Dr Roshin Paulose, a gastroenterologist at Little Flower Hospital Angamaly, said that though studies show that incidence of NAFLD is 50%, chances of inflammation of the liver are lower at 20-30%. "Ultrasound scans can reveal fatty liver. But the chances of this leading to liver diseases is only around 20-30%. The chances of this leading to severe liver diseases are even less," Dr Roshin said.

Dr Abhishek Yadav of VPS Lakeshore Hospital & Research Centre, said that 90% of liver disease cases in Kerala happen due to lifestyle diseases like diabetes, fatty liver, hepatitis, and alcoholism. "There is a misconception among people that liver diseases are only caused by alcohol consumption. But, of the transplantation surgeries I have done, only 20-25% were because of alcoholism. About 60-75% were due to other reasons. The increasing numbers are also due to changes from a more sedentary lifestyle," Dr Abhishek said.

This misconception even leads patients to hide their disease. "The chances of liver disease occurrence are high among alcoholics. But, because somebody does not drink, does not mean they are safe from such diseases," he said.

Dr Abhishek urged people to subject themselves to regular checkups and tests, as the symptoms of liver problems make their presence felt at an advanced stage. "Liver diseases are silent killers. Symptoms will be visible only at a very advanced

stage of liver failure. So, regular tests are essential for early detection,” Dr Abhishek said. He added that we can reduce incidence by leading a healthy life.

Dr Arun Valsan, clinical assistant professor of gastroenterology and hepatology at Amrita Hospital, echoed the views, saying liver diseases are caused not only by alcohol consumption. Unhealthy lifestyles and other causes like obesity, diabetes, and lack of exercise also lead to liver diseases. “Most of the liver disease cases are due to lifestyle diseases and alcohol consumption. Occurrence of hepatitis is less in Kerala compared to north India,” he said.

When asked about the treatment, he said that the disease can be controlled by following a good diet. “If detected early, one should control diet, obesity, and alcohol consumption. Liver transplantation is the best option for patients in severe conditions of liver failure,” Dr Arun said.

When asked about the risk factors of liver transplantation, he replied that risk factors are less as the surgery is done by experts using advanced technologies.

“The most important factor is to find an ideal donor. So far, the success rate of liver transplantation surgeries is 80 to 85%,” he added.