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Heart disease hits Indians early, diabetes, high BP make it worse

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In the Indian pool of heart patients, almost every second patient has high blood pressure, every fourth has diabetes and every fifth had plaque deposits in his her arteries.

This scientific picture of Indian heart diseases, at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is touring the US, comes from the American College of Cardiology's (ACC) newly set up study centres across India. ACC is a not-for-profit medical association that works out guidelines for cardiac treatment which are invariably followed across the world. The ongoing study provided data of 85,295 patients who clocked 2.11 lakh visits to out-patient departments of 15 hospitals from Mumbai to Patna over the last 26 months. Of these patients from both urban centres and rural areas -60,836 were found to have heart disease.

"In capturing all-India data, this is one of the most scientific studies," said Dr Prafulla Kerkar, the head of Parel's KEM Hospital's cardiology department. He is also the chairperson of ACC's Pinnacle registry's India Quality Improvement Programme.

In the backdrop of World Heart Day on Monday, the ACC data underlines that the average age of a heart patient in India is 52 years.

"If one looks at ACC's American registry, the average age is much higher in the seventies. Clearly, Indians get hit with heart disease much earlier," said Dr Ganesh Kumar, cardiologist at Hiranandani Hospital in Powai and vice-chairperson of the study . The ACC study , for the first time, shows how badly diabetes affects the Indian heart. It provides the breakup of the 13,077 patients with diabetes who visited the 15 centres a total of 35,441 times. "Here, we found a doubling of the diseases. For instance, 32% of the diabetic patients had narrowed arteries or coronary artery disease. Almost 10% of them had heart failure and 70% had hypertension. The corresponding numbers for non-diabetic patients are half," said Dr Ganesh Kumar.

He said the actual number of diabetic patients with heart complications would run into millions. "The amount of time and money lost due to treatment would not only be high for a particular family , but it would translate into a huge economic burden for the country as well. In fact, this is what the US is going through today with the increasing number of heart failure patients," he added.

Heart failure and atrial fibrillations are two relatively new heart conditions that Indian doctors have begun tracking. "The ACC data provides an insight into the type of patients walking into our heart clinics," said Dr Prafulla Kerkar. "If more centres across India are roped in to maintain data of heart disease, then we can understand the complete nature of our heart burden. We will be able to design better heart health policies," he added.