

Importance of Regular Health Check-ups – Dr. Th. Dhabali Singh

Prevention is better than cure. A stitch in time saves nine. More than being just simple proverbs that we learnt in school, in all likelihood, there must have been times in our adult life, when we realised the profundity of these simple one-liners. In some way or the other, we all must have been through situations that reminded us of the importance of prevention and how our habit of procrastination had cost us dear. And if it's about our health and when we are sick, it really hits us hard – we feel awful. This is where the relevance of preventive health care comes in.

PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE HELPS

One is reminded of a quote by Dalai Lama which goes thus: *"Man surprised me most about humanity. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health..."*. Although the great spiritual leader said much more than this and that he might have been trying to emphasise the need for mankind's collective awakening to spirituality, we are struck by the wisdom in his words. Medical science, and for that matter medical diagnostics have been evolving at a rapid pace and today, we have at our disposal, facilities at a nearby hospital or a diagnostic centre that provides us with a wide range of health check-up packages to choose from. Preventive health care is an ex-ante concept and requires planning and execution well ahead of time even when disease or illness is absent. It is about maintaining our body and good health throughout our lifetime to prevent diseases from happening. It requires, needless to say, inculcating healthy habits and lifestyle, which might not be convenient for everyone and which may require making a few sacrifices. Eating right, avoiding harmful substances like tobacco, alcohol and excessive amounts of sugar or salt, and of course, exercises are important. Healthy habits act as an effective mechanism against most illnesses and make us live a long, healthy and happy life.

WHY HEALTH CHECK-UPS?

Preventive screening remains controversial and confusing to the health care consumers. While the advantages of preventive screening for diseases is hard to counter, there are arguments that screening does not always lead to better health. We can leave these arguments for the moment because it is a fact that preventive check-ups help catch maladies early. For anyone who is above 35 years, it is always better to check their health status even if they are in normal health. In today's age, the changing lifestyle, stress and pollution levels can lead to health issues for which early checks are necessary before the problem gets compounded. Diabetes, blood pressure, high cholesterol levels can begin early in life which, if not detected and intervened in time, can have more serious repercussions later. Many ailments begin without fair warning signals, but if detected early, we can take up corrective actions. These actions can be dietary changes or simply an adjustment in lifestyle without the need for medical intervention.

COMPOSITION OF A REGULAR HEALTH CHECK-UP

Besides an overall physical examination, which includes the eyes and teeth, a standard health check-up is meant to assess the functioning of the heart, lungs, digestive system, liver, kidneys and,

immune system status. Sometimes certain cancer-specific tests like PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) for men and mammography and some gynaecological examinations in women are also included. A health check-up primarily comprise of pathology (blood, urine and stool), imaging (x-ray and ultrasonography), lungs function test and cardiac stress test. These tests should ideally be carried out in an accredited laboratory or a hospital which is equipped with the best diagnostic tools. It is very important that the results of these tests be interpreted and examined by qualified physicians.

COMMON INVESTIGATIONS IN A REGULAR HEALTH CHECK-UP

A regular health check-up will comprise of the following investigations:

1. Complete Haemogram: It is a panel of tests to examine different components of blood and used as broad screening test for such disorders as anaemia, infection, and many other diseases.
2. Lipid Profile: Used to assess the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases.
3. Liver Function Test: Used to assess the functioning of the liver or diagnose liver diseases (such as jaundice).
4. Kidney Function Test: Used to evaluate how well the kidneys are functioning.
5. Fasting Blood Sugar: Used to measure blood glucose after one has not eaten for at least 8 hours. This test is used for checking pre-diabetes and diabetes.
6. Chest X-ray: Used to examine the chest and the organs and structures located in the chest.
7. ECG: Used as a diagnostic tool to measure the rate and regularity of heartbeats.
8. Ultrasonography: Diagnostic imaging technique used for visualising organs and structures inside the body.
9. Urine Routine Examination: Used for general evaluation of health, metabolic or systematic diseases.

WHY CHECK-UPS ARE IMPORTANT?

Getting the right type of health check-up is important and while considering it, certain factors like age, lifestyle, family history, and risks should be taken into account. Regular health examinations and tests help detect problems before they start. Opting for a right health check-up, screenings, and treatments means one is taking steps to help one live longer and healthier life. If nothing else, it gives important information about one's body to ensure peace of mind and to make lifestyle adjustments. Even the most basic health check-ups can identify underlying illnesses. An illness picked up in the early stages is, after all, far easier to cure.

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