

Maintaining Health

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Health is essential for one's well-being. Yet, it is often given a lower priority in today's changing lifestyle. Household duties and busy work schedules have left little room to attend to health needs, while irregular eating habits, lack of physical exercises and mental stress have further affected a person's health leading to various diseases and illnesses.

Given this situation, there is an urgent need for attention to one's own health from the individuals themselves. Regular medical examinations are vital in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle, detect ailments early and prevent further complications, explains Dr Jagathlal Wickramarachchi, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist of the Women's Health Unit of the Military Hospital.

By Madhushala Senaratne

The Well Woman concept provides services for women to obtain regular medical examinations and identify conditions that, if left unattended, would result in further complications.

The underlying concept, under which Well Woman clinics are operated across the country, was initiated by the Government, having identified the need to overcome illnesses such as cancer, at an early stage, thereby preventing or minimising complications. The clinics have been implemented by the Government through the Family Health Bureau that act as the central coordinating body with services provided by Public Health Officers located islandwide.

Elaborating on the benefits of obtaining regular medical check-ups and examinations from the Well Woman clinics, Dr Wickramarachchi states that through close observation the expert team of medical staff identify changes or conditions in one's body that would lead to illnesses such as cancer in the future if left untreated.

"The most common cancer in women is breast cancer, and next comes cervical cancer. Both

these affect young people. However, they are preventable. What we concentrate on at the Well Woman clinic is to teach women how to conduct their own examinations, after which, we examine them ourselves and spot any early changes, which can lead to cancer in 10 to 15 years time," he explains. Based on the initial reports, patients are then advised on further treatment and medical check-ups.

For instance, conditions relating to certain types of cancer, such as cervical cancer, can be identified very early. In fact, if a woman is diagnosed with cervical cancer at the age of 45, certain changes that take place in her leading to this can be identified as early as at the age of 25, if examined. The 'Pap Test' is one such test, generally done in the Well Woman clinic.

The clinics are especially targeted at low-income earning women who lack access to education. Although reaching the targeted community remains one of the major challenges, the Government has initiated a range of measures in creating greater awareness among the public.

Health education through media is often conducted reaching the rural segments in society, while the roles of the Family Health Bureau, Medical Officers of Health and Public Health Officers are significant. Such representatives are appointed for each district, with at least one Medical Officer of Health or a member of his / her team located within 20 miles of each other. Yet another challenge is that women, especially the rural poor, are reluctant to discuss their health issues, such as issues on reproductive health, in public. Empowering and educating women is vital in the regard of their well-being, adds Dr Wickramarachchi.

In considering working women, striking a balance between work, family and health is extremely essential, says Dr Wickramarachchi. As women aspire to climb the corporate ladder, while caring for their families, health might be attached little significance. "The same priority that a woman gives to her family and their work should also be given to their own health. We go to a doctor when we are not well, but what we are suggesting here is that we should visit a doctor when we are in fact, well and in good health. Most women do not spare time for these kind of activities," he further added.

Being conscious of eating habits and the type and amount of food consumed are also important. Given the busy lifestyle, many would opt to eat-out. Food and hospitality industry must focus on this issue when they plan their businesses. A balanced diet, which includes fruits and vegetables, is ideal. "Women play an extremely responsible role in making the family healthier as they are the ones who decide which food to prepare for the family. However, they also need to be conscious of themselves. Unless you make a special attempt

to get back on your normal track, you will be faced with disaster," he concludes.