

Hypertension affecting every third or fourth person in Kashmir: Experts

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Hypertension, commonly known as high blood pressure, is rapidly emerging as one of the biggest public health concerns in Kashmir, with doctors warning that the condition is silently affecting a significant portion of the population, including young adults and even school-going children.

Medical experts described hypertension as a "silent killer" because it often develops without noticeable symptoms, while gradually damaging vital organs and increasing the risk of heart attacks, brain strokes, kidney failure and other life-threatening complications.

Dr Mohammad Salim Khan, Head of the Department of Community Medicine at Government Medical College (GMC) Srinagar, said hypertension has become the most prevalent non-communicable disease and is affecting nearly every third or fourth person.

"Hypertension is the most prevalent

non-communicable disease affecting every third to fourth person. However, being without any symptoms, it affects the end organs and can cause heart attacks, brain strokes and other complications unless diagnosed early and treated properly," he said.

Dr Khan said the growing burden of hypertension is closely linked to drastic lifestyle and dietary changes witnessed in recent years.

"The lifestyle changes, including high consumption of salt, oils and fats, fast foods, sugars, along with sedentary lifestyle, minimal physical activity, stress and addiction to tobacco, alcohol and narcotics, are major risk factors pushing people towards hypertension at an early age," he said.

He warned that hypertension and pre-hypertension are no longer confined to older people, stating that adolescents and even young children are increasingly being diagnosed with the condition.

Doctors expressed concern that a ma-



Majority of patients remain unaware that they are suffering from high blood pressure until serious complications develop.

"The majority of hypertensive patients are unaware of their condition, which can

eventually lead to cardiovascular events such as heart attacks and strokes. Even among diagnosed patients, many fail to take medicines regularly," Dr Khan said. Highlighting Kashmir-specific dietary

habits, Dr Khan said excessive consumption of traditional salted tea and bakery products is also contributing significantly to the problem. "Noon Chai consumption by Kashmiris is one of the major contributors to hypertension in the Kashmiri population. Further, the local bakery products, particularly kandur tchot, also contain considerable amounts of salt," he said.

Doctors said while the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a daily salt intake of less than five grams, many Kashmiris consume nearly double or even triple that amount through traditional foods and eating habits.

Dr Aabid Hussain from the Directorate of Health Services Kashmir (DHSK), posted in south Kashmir, said hypertension continues to remain largely undetected because it usually does not produce obvious symptoms. "Every third or fourth adult in our area has hypertension, but almost half of them are unaware of their condition, as hypertension often shows no symptoms during its course apart from vague com-

plaints that are often attributed to other illnesses," he said.

He added that poor control of blood pressure among diagnosed patients is another major concern. "Unfortunately, four out of five hypertensive patients do not keep their blood pressure under control, which can lead to severe consequences including heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure," Dr Aabid said.

According to doctors, increasing screen time, lack of outdoor activities, unhealthy eating patterns and mounting stress levels are accelerating the rise in hypertension among younger generations.

They stressed the need for mass awareness programmes in schools, colleges and workplaces to educate people about healthy lifestyle choices and preventive measures. They advised that all adults should get their blood pressure checked at least once every year, while people above 30 years of age should undergo regular screening even if they do not experience symptoms.

Breathtaking mountains of Kashmir feel wonderfully familiar to Swiss: Switzerland envoy in Kashmir

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: The Swiss Ambassador to India, H.E. Maya Tissafi, has described the breathtaking mountains of Kashmir as "wonderfully familiar to a Swiss" during her visit to Kashmir.

In a post on X, the ambassador said she held discussions with Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo and former Minister Sajad Lone on the region's development priorities and future opportunities.

"In #Srinagar, I had insightful discussions with Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo and former Minister @sajadlone on the region's development priorities and future opportunities," she said.

She further said the



Swiss expertise is already contributing to Kashmir's growth story from infrastructure projects and hydropower technology to innovation in high-altitude climate studies and dairy farming.

"We also explored

opportunities for future collaboration in vocational training, hospitality, food processing and tourism," she said, adding that she also had a memorable introduction to the spirit of Kashmir, including the beautiful Nishat Garden.

Haven't seen such weather before': J&K nomads bear brunt of unusual climate

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Every summer, long serpentine caravans of sheep, goats and horses begin climbing the rugged mountain tracks of Jammu and Kashmir as the nomadic Gujjar and Bakarwal communities undertake their centuries-old transhumance migration towards the high-altitude Himalayan meadows.

But this year, the journey has turned harsh and uncertain. Unusual snowfall, repeated hailstorms and incessant rain over the past several weeks have disrupted the traditional migration routes, leaving thousands of nomadic families struggling to protect their livestock — their only source of livelihood.

According to the details available from Gurez to Sonamarg and the upper reaches near Zoji La, fresh snowfall has continued well into late May, while evening hailstorms have become a near-daily phenomenon across several parts of Kashmir.

he mountains, which usually open into green grazing pastures by this time of the year, still remain partially buried under snow. "We have never seen weather like this in recent years. Every evening there is hailstorm or heavy rain. Our animals are weak, the routes are slippery and many families are stuck midway," said Mohammad Yousuf, a Bakarwal herder moving towards the upper reaches of Sonamarg with nearly 300 sheep.

Wrapped in a traditional pheran and standing beside drenched livestock near a temporary roadside camp, Yousuf said the changing weather has

increased fear among nomadic families.

"We spend nights in the open mountains. The children are shivering and the animals have no proper grass to graze because the meadows are still under snow," he added.

The worsening weather recently triggered a major tragedy in south Kashmir's Pahalgam area where more than 69 livestock animals were killed after lightning struck a pasture during heavy rain and thunderstorm.

For many nomadic families, such losses are devastating.

"One animal feeds an entire household. Losing dozens of sheep means losing a year's income," said 55-year-old tribal elder Abdul Rashid near Baltal. "The weather has become completely unpredictable now."

The annual migration, locally known as Baharwal, is a vital seasonal movement in which Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes travel hundreds of kilometres from the plains of Jammu towards the alpine dhoks of Kashmir in search of fresh grasslands for grazing.

Traditionally, the migration follows a predictable rhythm shaped by weather and mountain conditions. However, tribal communities say climate patterns have changed drastically in recent years.

"Earlier snowfall would end by April in many places, but this year even late May looks like winter in the mountains," said Shabir Ahmed, another shepherd from Rajouri district. "Every evening dark clouds gather suddenly and hail starts falling," he said.

The harsh weather has also slowed the movement

of caravans along steep mountain passes, forcing many families to halt for days along highways and forest routes.

At several makeshift camps near Sonamarg, smoke rose from damp firewood as women prepared meals inside temporary tarpaulin shelters while children huddled beside livestock to escape the cold winds.

Officials from the Meteorological Department have predicted more rain, thunderstorms and hailstorm activity in the coming days, while fresh snowfall continues in higher reaches.

For Kashmir's nomadic tribes, the changing weather is no longer just a seasonal inconvenience — it is becoming a growing threat to a way of life carried through generations across the Himalayas.

Italian, Bulgarian cherries fetch Rs 200-300 per kg in Kashmir, growers optimistic

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: The cultivation of imported cherry varieties from Italy and Bulgaria is emerging as a profitable venture for growers in Kashmir, with farmers reporting encouraging market prices and improved resistance to erratic weather conditions compared to traditional cultivars.

While the Valley's conventional cherry varieties are yet to arrive in markets, the early-ripening imported cultivars have already begun generating returns for orchardists in several districts, particularly in Pulwama and Shopian.

Growers told that the imported cherries are currently selling between Rs 200 and Rs 300 per kilogram in local markets, giving much-needed financial relief to orchardists after years of fluctuating prices and weather-related losses.

Asif Ahmad, a cherry grower from Pulwama, said that despite a decline in overall production this year, the rates have remained favourable, raising hopes among farmers.

"This season, the crop is much less compared to normal years, but the prices are quite encouraging," Ahmad said. "Both imported and traditional Siyah varieties are fetching good rates in the market. If prices continue to remain stable, growers may be able to recover some of the losses caused by the lower production."

He said the imported varieties have also helped farmers diversify their orchards and reduce risks linked to unpredictable weather patterns. "The biggest advantage is that these cherries are more resistant to light rainfall. Traditional cherries can crack very quickly after rain, which af-

fects their quality and market value," he added.

Irfan Ahmad, a grower from Shopian, said the staggered harvesting pattern of the imported cultivars is proving beneficial for growers as it prevents market oversupply.

"Traditional varieties usually ripen together within a short period, forcing growers to sell quickly before the fruit perishes," Irfan Ahmad said. "But the imported varieties mature in phases, which ensures a continuous supply to the market and helps maintain better prices."

He added that the longer harvesting season has also created additional employment opportunities for labourers associated with cherry orchards. "Earlier, the harvesting season would last only a few weeks, but now the work extends for nearly two months because of these imported

varieties. It benefits both orchard owners and workers," he said.

President of the Kashmir Valley Fruit Growers and Dealers Union, Bashir Ahmad Basheer, said the market response this year has been positive despite a noticeable decline in production.

"This year's cherry output is nearly 50 per cent less than the normal production due to weather-related factors, but the market rates are very good," Basheer said. "If the prices continue at this level during the peak season, it will help growers compensate for the losses caused by the reduced yield."

He said growers are optimistic as traditional varieties, including Makhmali, Siyah, Awal Number, Jadi, Holland, Double, Mishry, Splendor and Steela are expected to arrive in markets in the coming weeks.

Overcrowding in GMCs, district hospitals irks patients, attendants

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Growing overcrowding inside wards at Government Medical Colleges (GMCs), its associated hospitals and district hospitals has become a major concern for patients and attendants alike, with many calling for stricter regulation of attendants inside hospital wards to ensure a peaceful and patient-friendly environment.

Several patients and attendants said that while doctors and healthcare workers continue to provide medical care under challenging circumstances, the lack of proper monitoring and regulation inside wards—particularly after doctors complete their rounds—often leads to chaos, noise and inconvenience for patients.

According to attendants, several wards witness large



gatherings around a single patient, with sometimes 15 to 20 people entering or remaining inside at the same time. They said such overcrowding not only disturbs critically ill patients but also affects hygiene, movement of hospital staff and overall discipline inside the wards.

Adnan Ahmad an attendant from Baramulla, whose relative is admitted in one of the medical wards in SMHS, said the situation

becomes extremely uncomfortable during peak hours.

"Patients need rest and calm surroundings, but many times the wards become crowded like public waiting halls. Too many attendants around one patient create unnecessary noise and disturbance for everyone," he said.

Ishfaq Ahmad another attendant from Anantnag whose patient is admitted at GMC Anantnag said there is

a need for a uniform policy across hospitals in Jammu and Kashmir, especially in major hospitals and district-level institutions.

"Two or three attendants per patient are more than sufficient. If authorities properly regulate entry into wards, it will help both patients and doctors. Elderly patients and those recovering from surgeries especially suffer due to continuous noise and rush," she said.

Several attendants also pointed out that overcrowding sometimes blocks passages inside wards, making it difficult for nurses, doctors and emergency staff to move freely during urgent situations.

A patient attendant from Pulwama said that many people accompanying patients enter wards out of concern, but the absence of regulation eventually creates problems for others.

PDD worker dies after falling from electric pole in Bandipora

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

BANDIPORA: A Power Development Department (PDD) employee died after sustaining critical injuries in a fall from an electric pole while carrying out power restoration work in Bandipora district.

The incident occurred when the worker was engaged in restoring electricity supply to consumers in the area.

According to reports, the worker accidentally fell from an electric pole during the restoration operation and suffered serious injuries. He was immediately shifted to Sub District Hospital Sopore for medical treatment and was later referred to Bone and Joint Hospital Srinagar for specialized care owing to the severity of his injuries.

However, despite medical efforts, he succumbed to his injuries. The deceased has been identified as Muhammad Yousuf



Shah, a Permanent Daily Labourer (PDL) posted at Electric Sub Division Kaloosa under Electric Division Bandipora.

The incident has drawn attention to the occupa-

tional risks faced by field staff and labourers involved in electricity restoration and maintenance operations, particularly during emergency repair work.

Schizophrenia treatable but stigma delays treatment: Psychiatrist

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Schizophrenia is a serious but treatable mental illness, yet thousands of patients continue to suffer silently due to stigma, fear and delayed medical intervention, psychiatrist Dr Abrar Guroo said.

Stressing the urgent need for awareness and compassionate care, he said misconceptions surrounding mental illness often prevent families from seeking timely psychiatric treatment, leading to worsening symptoms, disrupted lives and avoidable long-term consequences.

Dr Guroo said that schizophrenia, though a serious mental illness, is treatable and manageable with timely psychiatric care, family support, and social understanding. However, he said, stigma surrounding mental illness in society continues to delay treatment and worsen outcomes for many patients.

The psychiatrist explained, "Schizophrenia af-



fects a person's thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and perception of reality. Patients commonly experience symptoms such as hearing voices, suspiciousness, false beliefs, disturbed sleep, social withdrawal, poor self-care, and reduced emotional expression. "One of the major difficulties in schizophrenia is

poor insight. Many patients are unable to recognise that they are unwell, which further delays treatment and medical intervention," he added.

Highlighting the social challenges associated with the illness, Dr Guroo said stigma remains one of the biggest barriers to recovery

in India. According to him, many families choose to hide symptoms due to fear of judgment, social shame, and discrimination.

"Instead of seeking psychiatric care early, many patients are taken to faith healers or kept isolated at home. By the time professional medical help is sought, valu-

able years may already have been lost," he said.

He warned that delayed treatment can have long-term consequences, including interrupted education, unemployment, strained family relationships, worsening psychiatric symptoms, and emotional stress within families.

"Research across the world consistently shows that early treatment leads to better recovery, improved functioning, and a better quality of life for patients," Dr Guroo added. The psychiatrist stressed that schizophrenia continues to be widely misunderstood in society, with many patients being unfairly labelled as dangerous or incapable of living independently.

"In reality, many people living with schizophrenia can study, work, maintain relationships, and lead independent lives when they receive proper treatment, medication, rehabilitation, and strong family support," he said.