

Is your heart fit?

BY RITAH MUKASA

Did you know that you can have a potentially life-threatening form of cardiovascular disease, without showing symptoms?

According to Dr Paul Kasenene of Well Care Clinic in Bugolobi, a suburb of Kampala, it is important to ascertain whether or not you have a heart-related disease since they can exist in our bodies without our knowledge.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are the leading cause of deaths globally.

It is estimated that about 17.5 million people died from CVDs in 2015 and of those, about seven million were due to stroke.

WHO says over three-quarters of these deaths occur in low and middle-income countries.

"Many people die annually from CVDs. The simple way to ascertain whether you are not at risk is by going for a health checkup," Dr Kasenene says.

What are CVDs?

Kasenene explains that there are many types of CVDs, but the most common are hypertension and coronary artery disease or disease of the blood vessels supplying the heart.

"These two diseases alone account for 80% of all cardiovascular deaths. And because high blood pressure and coronary artery disease may have no symptoms, unfortunately for some people, a heart attack or a stroke could be the first sign," he elaborates.

Other life-threatening forms of cardiovascular disease that you should be aware of include clots and abnormalities in heart rhythm.

Could you be at risk?

Screening tests help in early detection and should be done at least once a year.

"There is nothing worse than regret and wishing you had taken the simple step of doing these potentially lifesaving tests," Dr Kasenene emphasises.

Important tests

■ Kasenene cautions everyone to know the health indicators of cardiovascular health, which include checking blood pressure and aiming for a reading of between 90/60mmHg to 120/80mmHg. This test could help you prevent a stroke.

■ You also need to check your body fat percentage, weight and body mass index (BMI) which helps you to understand

the best weight for your body, based on your height.

"A large waist is more dangerous than being overweight when it comes to heart problems," he asserts.

■ A cholesterol test is also important as it indicates the level of good or bad cholesterol in your body. It is a useful screening test to assess how your body is affected by foods rich in unhealthy fats and sugars that can increase your risk for build-up of a fat-like substance that can affect blood flow.

■ Lastly, a blood sugar screen is used to assess how your body metabolises sugar. It is a screen for diabetes as well. High blood sugar is linked to cardiovascular disease.

However, Kasenene notes that even if all the above tests are normal, it does not necessarily mean you have great cardiovascular health or that you have no risk.

“A large waist is more dangerous than being overweight”

This is because before someone's blood pressure or sugar levels become detectably abnormal, they could have had some degree of abnormal dysfunction in your cardiovascular system for many years, which makes it undetectable.

"Fortunately, we can now assess cardiovascular dysfunction and detect any issues many years before they cause high blood pressure," Kasenene says.

How to guard your heart
Okello advises to lead a healthy lifestyle in order to keep the arteries strong and clear of plaque.

"To improve your heart health, quit smoking, control blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes," he emphasises.

Exercise regularly, avoid fatty and sugary foods to maintain a healthy weight and manage stress.

Additionally, Kasenene advises against consumption of large amounts of unrefined white table salt.

"Also, avoid eating unhealthy processed and refined meats and refined carbohydrates. Check your weight, more so, your belly," he cautions.