

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon on June 12, 2025. Sunjay Kapur was at Guards Polo Club in Surrey, England, one of the most exclusive clubs in the world, playing the sport of polo, which he adored.

The Indian businessman, formerly married to Bollywood actress Karisma Kapoor, was at the pinnacle of business success.

At just 53, as chairman of Sona Comstar, a company founded by his father Surinder Kapur in 1997, but which he expanded across the globe, he was worth \$1.2b.

Right in the middle of the game, Kapur suddenly began having difficulty breathing. He said to those standing nearby that he thought he swallowed something — perhaps a bee.

He took a few steps and collapsed. Paramedics arrived shortly and gave him vigorous cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) on the spot. An air ambulance hovered nearby just in case he needed to be whisked off to the nearest hospital facility. But the paramedics knew better. The helicopter was not needed. They stopped the CPR procedure. They covered his body with a sheet. Sunjay Kapur was dead.

The scene is eerily like the death in April 2016 of famous Congolese singer Papa Wemba, who collapsed on stage while performing live in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. And just last week, the sudden death of Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Armoured Division Commander Maj. Gen. Deus Sande, who developed breathing complications while on his way to attend the funeral of his compatriot, the late Deputy Commander Land Forces Maj. Gen. Francis Takirwa. Efforts to revive him were too late. The provisional medical report suggested the general passed away due to hypertensive heart disease. Heart attack is the silent killer that stalks the victim to within striking distance and, often, when it strikes, it is too late to reverse the process. But that does not mean nothing can be done to prevent heart attacks and strokes.

There is a great deal already known about these killers because thousands of studies explain what is going on inside the body. When Mass General Brigham and Harvard University analysed data from 85,551 adults, the study published in December 2025 found that depression and anxiety — often driven by chronic stress — were linked with a higher risk of heart attack, stroke, and major cardiovascular events. People with both depression and anxiety had about a 32% higher risk than those with only one condition or neither.

# How to avoid walking with a heart attack waiting to happen

## OPIYO OLOYA EDUCATIONIST

As well, study after study has linked a high risk of heart attack to the lifestyle of people in leadership. Roles, such as military command, executives, administrators, political leaders, managers require high responsibility, long hours at the desk, pressures to make impactful decisions, and crisis management of one kind or another. In addition to work-related stress, leaders have little time to eat properly, exercise and experience moments of peace to decompress and relax. All of these, according to readily available science, increase blood pressure, adrenaline, Cortisol (stress hormone) and inflammation.

Living with constant stress is not good for the body. Over time, stress contributes to cardiovascular strain — hypertension and Atherosclerosis (plaque buildup in arteries). In lay language, it is as if the body is preparing to tear your heart out of your chest.

But that is not all. Your heart is happiest when you are not sitting there like a log, waiting to die. Get up, be active and stay active. Exercise lowers the risk of heart disease,

partly because it reduces stress.

A study by Massachusetts General Hospital published in 2024 in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* analysed the active lifestyle of 50,359 participants and found a 23% lower risk of developing heart disease over a period of 10 years. More dramatically, a study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* in 2024 and 2025 concluded that just four minutes of incidental movement, like climbing the stairs and fast walking, was linked with "a 51% lower risk of heart attack and 67% lower risk of heart failure in middle-aged women."

Here is the deal. In our hurried and hurried modern lifestyle, we mistake hustling with success while neglecting the most important part of our lives — our bodies. We don't think much about our health, until the body starts complaining and, in some cases, simply quits working altogether. Then we say — Oh, so and so died, it was very unfortunate — completely omitting the part that such deaths are preventable. Seriously, if one is not in denial, everyone, including leaders, must ask a very simple question: Am I walking with a heart attack waiting to happen?

If one is managing stressful roles well, if they are eating properly, exercising regularly and relaxing appropriately, chances are they are doing all the right things to keep stress, heart attack and stroke at bay.

So, what does a proper diet look like?

Eating a proper diet is not, repeat, is not about going to your favourite grill joint for another snort of fatty meats. If you are eating "the way modern people do", know you are eating all the wrong foods — too much salt, sugar and all sorts of grilled meats, and processed foods like chips, fries, soda, flavoured cakes and energy drinks which will surely kill you in good time, if something else doesn't.

None of these is good for your health. Especially your heart.

Instead, if you really want to understand a successful and healthy diet, think vegetables, plenty of fruits and nuts. Less fried foods and more wholesome grains.

A study led by US and Greek researchers over 20 years involving 105,614 women teachers and administrators in California public schools found that those who followed a Mediterranean diet (high consumption of vegetables, fruits, legumes, cereals, fish, and olive oil) were associated with an 18% lower risk of total stroke, including a 25% lower risk of haemorrhagic stroke.

Viewed from the lenses of foods available in most Sub-Saharan Africa, including in Uganda, the so-called Mediterranean diet is simply this — Eat your *sukumawiki* every day, love your spinach, *malakwang* and *dodo*, crack some raw groundnuts often, eat more *binyewa* and boiled or mashed *matooke*, and never forget that millet works miracles. Keep your heart happy with natural food, including easily available fruits like sweet bananas, mangoes (during season), pineapples, papaya, passion fruits, citrus fruits, guava and the list goes on.

Then get out and go for that walk. Your heart will love you more.

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