

CEO *Lifestyle*

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ACT, DON'T REACT

Eating well, exercising daily, avoiding alcohol – there is a lot we do to live better and avoid health troubles but are preventive check-ups one of them? No, they are not. Neha Malude talks to Amol Naikwadi, Joint Managing Director of Indus Health Plus, to find out why simply having a good lifestyle is not enough anymore.

Prevention is better than cure – an idiom that every one of us has heard while growing up. But let's take this a bit more literally, shall we? Track back to the last time you visited the doctor's office. Were you ill or was it just a regular check up? Chances are that it was the former. The concept of proactive medical check-ups has never really caught on in India but maybe it is time that it did.

Amol Naikwadi discovered the importance of preventive healthcare the hard way. A personal tragedy in the life of an ambitious chartered accountant led to an earnest discussion with friends and family that ended with one conclusion: the loss of their loved ones could have been prevented had the problem been detected earlier. With this thought in mind, Naikwadi eventually decided to lay the foundation for Indus Health Plus, a preventive healthcare facility with one message – it is better to act than to react.

“In my conversations with doctors and medical experts, I realized that in medical schools in the early years, students are taught the importance of

prevention. By the time they pass out, though, the stress is more on treatment. But more importantly, Indians tend to have a fatalistic approach. How many people do you know who see a doctor despite not being ill? How many of us make sure we get a complete physical check up done at least once a year? We go to a hospital only if there is something wrong, isn't it?” says Naikwadi.

Yes. But the real question is, why? “Getting a medical check-up means having to get a dozen tests, going to and fro to collect those results, multiple visits to several diagnostic centres, all of which translates into days of time ‘wasted’. Another and a more obvious reason is the cost – the ‘why should I spend money if I am healthy?’ mentality. One of the first things people ask us, no matter how well off or well educated they are, is ‘would this have a tax benefit? Can I submit this as an expense to my company?’ And as if that wasn't bad enough, a few years back our hospitals looked really dreary and depressing and that is what discourages people from visiting hospitals the most,” reveals Naikwadi.

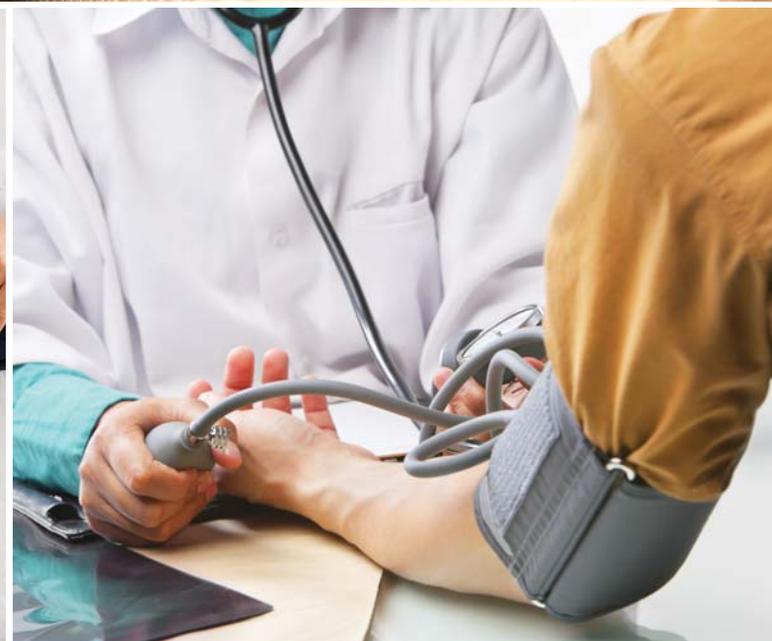


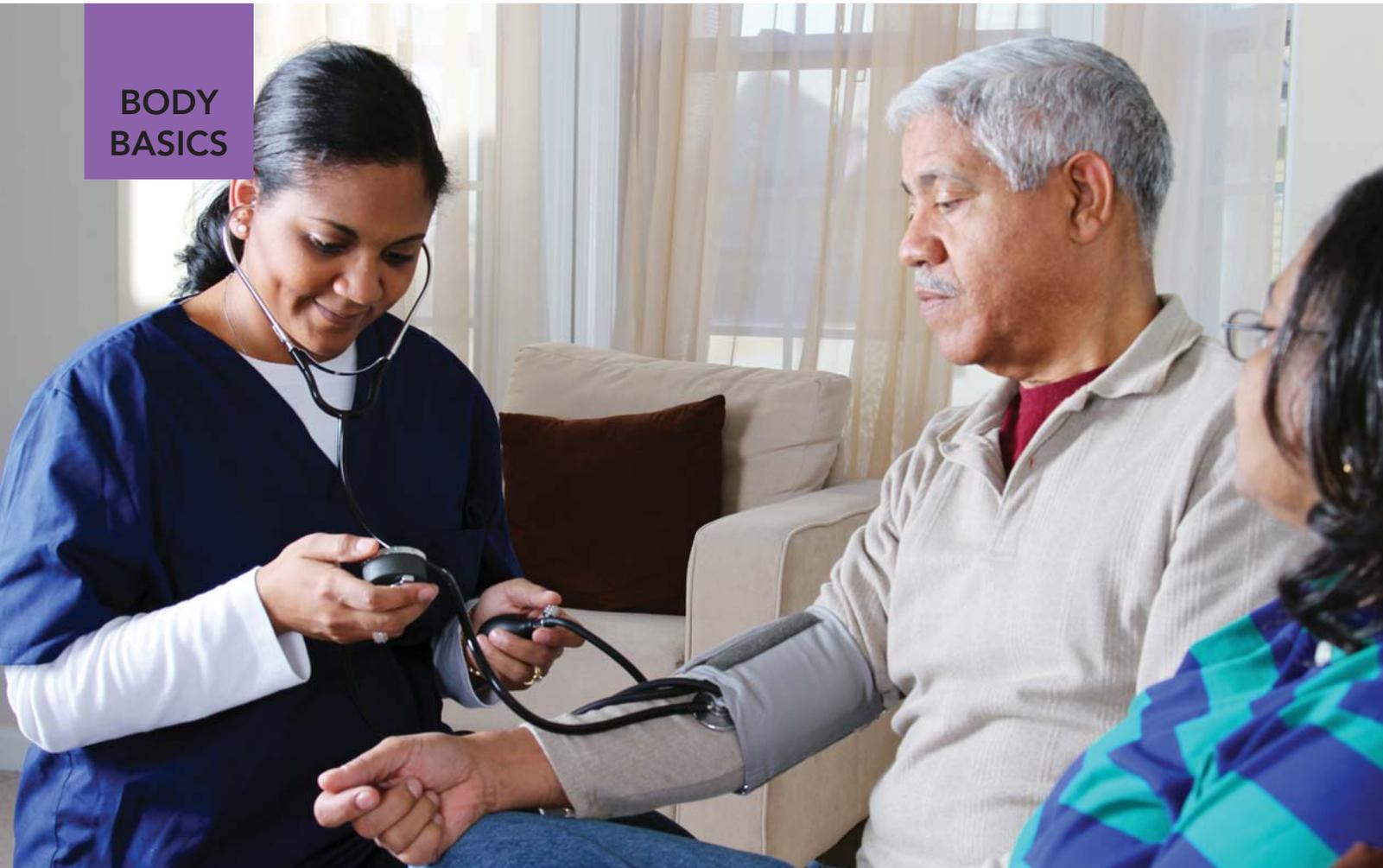
Even if you are a seemingly healthy person with no medical issues whatsoever, preventive healthcare is imperative. The reason is quite simple – our lifestyles. Times are tough, the competition is rough, there are a million deadlines to meet and even if you somehow find the time to eat well and exercise, there are some medical problems that still land at your doorstep unannounced. Like someone who has never smoked a cigarette in his life might fall prey to lung cancer, or someone with hypertension might be at risk for a stroke even though they do not exhibit any symptoms of it. The point is, with a preventive check up, you might discover lung cancer in its first stage or the risk of a stroke before it happens. What does that save you? An immense amount of time spent recuperating in hospitals, gigantic medical bills, but most importantly, the mental and physical trauma that is suffered not just by you but your family as well. Naikwadi believes that people refuse to accept the fact that something like this could happen to them. “People have a tendency to think that they will never face a situation where they might discover that they’re at a risk for a heart disease. It’s classic denial. The funny part is, no educated person will deny the importance of preventive health care but does that translate into him enrolling for a check up?” he asks.

At Indus Health Plus, Naikwadi and his team have tried to address these exact issues. “For starters, you receive all the test results, no matter how many, on the very same day.” Naikwadi has no illusions about the financial aspect of preventive healthcare, either. It is expensive, he admits. “Which is why, we share infrastructure with our partners. So, a comprehensive health check-up package that would usually cost you Rs. 40,000, now costs you only Rs. 16,000, in every city. The staff at our health centre tries to make clients as comfortable as possible and engage them. If your experience at a clinical facility is pleasant, you wouldn’t hesitate to come back. Not only that, you would encourage the rest of your family to go there and get checked. Our client then, becomes our brand ambassador and promotes the credibility of our work,” he explains.



Amol Naikwadi, Joint Managing Director of Indus Health Plus, Pune





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Not surprisingly, the largest target sectors are that of working professionals, between the ages of 25 and 35 and senior professionals. CEOs are getting younger and lifestyle diseases have crossed age barriers. "The worst part is that none of these lifestyle diseases are symptomatic. It can happen any time, to anyone," cautions Naikwadi. He is quick to point out that they are not even gender-biased anymore. "The stress levels and lifestyle habits affect men and women differently but the overall impact is equal. Women may not smoke, for instance, but the stress they incur is much higher because they juggle so many important responsibilities."

The largest obstacle in the area of preventive healthcare is getting people to practice it. And that is because they do not understand the gravity of the situation, which in turn happens because there is very little awareness of the concept. "Even if a company pays for its employees' medical check-ups, it isn't necessary that the response will be a 100 percent. We have seen employees making excuses of being busy with client visits, reports, etc. If we sit them down and explain that they need to see a doctor every six months because they might find out that they have a 99 percent blockage in your heart, that's when they will really listen and understand the importance of being proactive," says Naikwadi.

You might be cynical about it but the truth is, and every one will agree, that we, as a nation aren't the healthiest. Statistics say that every minute, four people die of a heart attack, two people die of diabetes and one person suffers a stroke. The solution is simple, effective and easily accessible – a proactive visit to the doctor. After all, a stitch in time saves nine, isn't it?