

S'poreans face heart failure 10 years before Westerners

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Singaporeans suffer from heart failure at the average age of 61, about 10 years earlier than Americans and Europeans, a study on Asian patients has found.

Singaporeans also have a higher prevalence of coronary artery disease, hypertension and diabetes – the three most common diseases that lead to heart failure – compared to Asians as a whole, Americans and Europeans.

In Singapore, 58 per cent of 1,066 patients in the study had diabetes, compared to 40 per cent both in Asia and the United States, and 33 per cent in Europe.

Presenting the findings yesterday at the National Heart Centre Singapore (NHCS), the principal investigator of the study, Associate Professor Carolyn Lam, said: “In Singapore, we have transitioned rapidly, and it’s now the baby boomers who have reached that age of 60, and they are manifesting heart failure from these risk factors.”

The study, involving more than 5,000 patients from 11 regions in Asia, also found that Malays from countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia are at the highest risk of heart failure.

It found that 62 per cent of Malays had hypertension, compared to 58 per cent of Chinese and 43 per cent of Indians.

“The silver lining is that most cardiovascular risk factors are modifiable. In other words, there is a lot we can do to reduce or prevent the risk of hypertension, diabetes and coronary heart disease,” said Dr Lam, who is a senior consultant at the Department of Cardiology at NHCS.

Describing them as “lifestyle diseases”, she said that even simple acts such as walking more and taking the stairs – coupled with eating

appropriate portions of food – can cut the risk of getting these diseases and, therefore, heart failure.

The study, which was done between 2012 and 2015, also found links between income level and the prevalence of the diseases.

For example, across the region, an Indian with high income was five times as likely to have diabetes compared to an Indian with low income.

Dr Lam said that the research team plans to follow up on the heart failure patients from the study for the next two to three years to observe them.

Professor Mark Richards from the National University Health System, which initiated the study, said:

“This study has given us the first prospective multinational data which shows that, aside from a consistently early age of onset compared with the West, there is no single Asian phenotype, and Asian heart failure patients are very different from each other.”

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Dr Lam (left) said that simple lifestyle changes such as walking more or eating appropriate portions of food can cut the risk of developing diseases that lead to heart failure. PHOTO: ALICIA CHAN FOR THE STRAITS TIMES