

Now, air pollution linked to strokes

It's The 3rd Largest Cause Globally: Study

Sushmi.Dey@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Air pollution has been identified for the first time as a major contributor for stroke leading to death and disability, mainly in developing and middle-income countries like India.

A new study, published in *Lancet Neurology*, shows air pollution is the third largest cause for stroke accounting for almost 30% of the global stroke burden.

Behavioral factors, such as smoking, poor diet and lack of physical activity, are the leading cause contributing to 74.2% of stroke, followed by metabolic disorders like cholesterol, high blood pressure and obesity.

Experts say behavioral factors and metabolic disorders have been linked in the past as well. However, the study assumes significance because of its findings pointing at air pollution as a leading indicator for stroke. In India, more than 1.2 million people were estimated to suffer strokes every year, making it the leading cause of death and disability in rural India.

Globally, about 15 million



people suffer strokes every year, of which nearly 6 million die and 5 million are left disabled — including loss of vision or speech, paralysis and confusion.

The *Lancet* study is based on analysis of data from a swathe of other studies, reports and official statistics to create a mathematical model estimating stroke risk for 188 countries from 1990 to 2013. The analysis was conducted by a team of international researchers.

"It is a landmark study pointing at pollution as an indicator for stroke for the first time. It is important also because there are no ideal treatment options for stroke and therefore, prevention is the best solution," says Dr CS Aggarwal, senior consultant, department of neurology, Ganga Ram Hospital.

Findings of the study show 90.5% of the stroke burden was attributable to 'modifiable factors' such as smoking, eating too much sugar and not exercising enough, as well as the associated health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease

Findings of the study show 90.5% of the stroke burden was attributable to "modifiable factors" such as smoking, eating too much sugar and not exercising enough, as well as the associated health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Doctors say changing lifestyle and habits in developing countries is a major concern for increasing burden of non-communicable diseases.

The study also listed air pollution as a "modifiable factor", indicating efforts by the government and people can make a difference. In low- and middle-income nations in Asia and Africa, almost a fifth of stroke burden was attributed to household air pollution, while a similar percentage was blamed on ambient air pollution in China and India.