

# The Optimist

Newsletter of Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN)

Volume 4, March 2011

## “The South Asian Diet, the Grandmother, and the Scientist- A Cautionary Tale”

The outreach educational event held on March 13, 2011 at the India House drew a large audience with over 160 people in attendance. The speaker was Dr. Alok Kalia, an eminent physician, author, and speaker. The topic was “The South Asian Diet, the Grandmother, and the Scientist- a Cautionary Tale.”

Dr. Kalia presented an excellent overview of the reasons for and manifestations of increased heart disease and diabetes among the South Asian community. He also mentioned that the presence of diabetes increases the risk of death from cancer. Ethnic South Asians run greater risk of developing heart disease and diabetes at a younger age with greater severity on account of certain factors in our genetic make-up; these include higher insulin resistance, a higher ratio of fat to BMI (body mass index), and a greater propensity to store fat around the abdomen. He explained that, contrary to popular belief, saturated fat is not the main culprit for these problems; rather, the overwhelming presence of starch (carbohydrates) in the Indian diet creates insulin resistance and “addictive hunger.” Dr. Kalia referred to this, tongue-in-cheek, as the *idli syndrome!*

The *triple threat* in the South Asian diet—atta/maida (highly processed wheat flour), rice, and potatoes—lead to a multitude of problems including the deposit of excess fats in the liver (metabolic syndrome), increased pressure on the pancreas culminating in severe diabetes (hyperinsulinemia), and elevated deposits of fat in the visceral area (which in turn lead to increased risk for heart disease). Dr. Kalia ended his presentation by offering practical, feasible dietary modifications to reduce this triple threat and reduce the risks of diabetes and heart disease. These modifications revolve around the concept of Glycemic Index (GI) of foods; the Glycemic index determines the rate at which glucose is absorbed into the body. In brief, foods with low GI are highly beneficial because they slow down the release of glucose into the blood and prolong the feeling of “fullness” after a meal, thereby preventing overeating.

Here are some of his suggestions to improve our diet.

1. At one major meal a day, avoid triple threat foods entirely.
2. At the other major meal, ensure that triple threat foods are no more than 1/3 of the total food on the plate.
3. Reduce the toxicity of the triple-threat foods by using coarsely ground atta and whole grain flour, sprouted grain products such as Ezekiel bread and tortillas, long grain rice and especially brown long grain rice, small new potatoes instead of large potatoes
4. Replace some rice with quinoa, add whole beans or lentils to quinoa and rice.

In sum, Dr. Kalia’s presentation was extremely informative and enlightening.

### Upcoming Events:

Volunteer Meeting

When: March 27, 2011

Where: American Cancer Society

Time: 3-5 PM

Outreach event (Details to follow)

When: May 15, 2011

Where: India House

Time: 3-5PM

Sincerely

IACAN Board



[www.iacannetwork.org](http://www.iacannetwork.org)

Phone: +1 713-370-3489

E-mail: [iacannetwork@gmail.com](mailto:iacannetwork@gmail.com)