SOMETHINGS the most unsuspecting things happen to us in the evening of an otherwise regular morning, changing our life and the way we look at life forever.

Struggling with her life, little did Anita (name changed) know that the fateful day of 17th November would give her a new lease of life. Anita, a 50-year-old school teacher, and a resident of Ghaziabad was suffering from end-staged chronic liver disease for which she needed an early liver transplant to save her life.

Her disease got further complicated when she also developed cancer in her already damaged liver about six months back, which made the need for a liver transplant all the more urgent. In the absence of an early liver transplant she would have reached a stage where a transplant would no longer be possible due to spread of the cancer outside the liver.

Incidentally, on the morning of 14th November, Mr. Joseph (name changed), a 45-year-old male patient suffered from brain haemorrhage due to high blood pressure. He presented to the casualty of our hospital and unfortunately on 16th November he was declared brain dead.

His 18-year-old son, Mohit, a student of engineering, approached our Grief Counsellor and told him that he was aware of organ donation as he had seen PM Shri Narendra Modi’s tweet on organ donation and had also listened to the PM’s programme on radio “Mann ki Baat” on 25th October 2015. Despite grieving over the news of his father’s death, Mohit took a courageous decision – he decided to donate his father’s liver to save someone’s life. In fact, Mohit convinced other members of his family to support him in this noble cause.

On the night of 17th November, Anita and her family were informed about the availability of the organ. They took an emergency flight from Hyderabad to Delhi for Orthotopic Liver Transplant. Soon after her arrival at the hospital, all the required tests were done.

The complications were many because of her various other health-related problems, underlying liver diseases and liver cancer. But after a long-drawn surgical operation, the transplant was done successfully. Anita was

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Liver is Life!

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The complications were many because of her various other health-related problems, underlying liver diseases and liver cancer. But after a long-drawn surgical operation, the transplant was done successfully. Anita was
discharged after two weeks and today she is leading a normal and happy life. Technically, it was a race against time to save her life as cadaveric transplants need to be completed in a short span to avoid organ damage.

The liver is the only organ that can regenerate itself thus making it possible for one person to donate part of their liver to another person. When a portion of the liver is transplanted, the donor’s liver will regenerate back to its original size while the transplanted portion will grow to the appropriate size for the recipient.

The liver is the most metabolically complex organ in the human body. It performs some very critical functions and so everyone needs to be aware of the possibilities of damage to the liver, what can be done to prevent it from getting damaged, and what are the treatments options available.

Situated in the right upper part of our abdomen, the liver weighs just over 1 kilogramme and is the largest internal organ of our body. At any given time, the liver contains about 10% of the blood in your body and pumps about 1.4 litres of the blood every minute.

It is not possible to live without the liver. It functions day and night round the clock to protect our body. It is involved in taking care of virtually everything we drink, eat, breathe or rub on our skin.

It neutralizes and removes alcohol, drugs, various chemicals, poisonous substances and toxins from our body; maintains a constant supply of energy for our body to function properly by providing and storing glucose and fat; helps in blood clotting; fights off infections and viruses; regulates the level of cholesterol, vitamins, and various hormones like cortisone and other adrenal hormones, thyroid hormones and sex hormones; and also regulates the level of essential vitamins and minerals like copper and iron. And these are only some of its 500+ functions!

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The liver is perhaps the most taken-for-granted organ in the body. Few know about the critical functions it performs. And fewer still know about the ill consequences of a damaged liver.

Taking care of our liver is far more about avoiding what’s bad than it is about eating or drinking things that are particularly nourishing to the liver.

The following general guidelines about diet and nutrition can be helpful for your liver:

a. Unhealthy and high fat diet can lead to obesity – a leading cause of fatty liver disease.

b. Have low fat, high-fibre foods and avoid excessive salt and sugar.

c. Prefer small regular meals. Avoid both fasting and over-eating.

d. Have plenty of fluids daily (6 to 8 glasses).

e. Choose organic foods whenever possible. The lesser the pesticides/chemicals/antibiotics/hormones, the lesser our liver has to filter.

f. Wash fruit and vegetables to remove pesticides.

g. Prefer fruits and vegetables with deep bright pigments such as orange, yellow, red and green colours.

h. Have raw vegetables with high sulphur content (for example, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, garlic and onions).

i. When cooking vegetables and fruits, prefer steaming or baking rather than boiling to retain more nutrients.

j. Choose whole-grain products over white/bleached/refined products.

The following advice is helpful for travellers to protect their liver:

a. Take precautions against malaria and yellow fever.

b. Practice safe sex practices.

c. Use bottled, purified or boiled water for drinking, ice cubes, brushing teeth, washing food, etc.

d. Use liberal hand washing with soap and clean water or alcohol-based hand wipes.

e. Make sure dairy products are pasteurized, fruit/vegetables are adequately cooked, well-washed or peeled, and meats/fish well cooked and eaten just after preparation.
Women are more susceptible to liver damage caused by alcohol.

f. Avoid food from street vendors.
g. If you fall ill, then consult the doctor before doing self medication.

Medications could also damage your liver under certain conditions. Try to follow the following advice to protect the liver from damage from medications:
a. Store medicines and vitamins out of reach of children or in child-proof containers. Adult medicines and supplements can do serious harm to a child’s liver if they are accidently swallowed.
b. Do not mix medications (like medicines for cold and pain) and/or herbal supplements unless specified by the doctor.

c. Certain vitamins like A, D, E, and K are harmful to the liver if taken in excessive doses. Never take more than the recommended dose.
d. Never mix medication with alcohol.
e. Get a liver test before starting any long-term medication and repeat it after the first few weeks to know its effect on liver. Then get regular liver tests throughout the duration of your treatment.
f. For people with chronic liver disease or other liver condition, consult the doctor before taking any medication or herbal remedy.
g. Herbal remedies such as kava have made headlines for their harmful effects on the liver. Use only under consultation.

Herbal supplements that can be toxic to the liver

| Artemisia   | Callilepis laureola |
| Crotalaria  | Greater celandine   |
| Jin bu huang| Ma huang             |
| Red peony root| Atractylis gummifera|
| Chaparral leaf| Gardenia            |
| Hare’s ear  | Kava                 |
| Mistletoe   | Chrysanthemum       |
| Germander   | Heliotropium         |
| LIV.52      | Plantago seed       |

Stick to the following advice to protect the liver from alcohol damage:
a. Say no to alcohol.
b. Women are more susceptible to liver damage caused by alcohol.
c. If you do take it, then drink in moderation. Not more than one to two drinks at a time and never on a daily basis.

d. Don’t try to keep up ‘drink for drink’ with your friends who may have a higher tolerance for alcohol.
e. The amount of alcohol – not the type – is what matters. One ‘drink’ is equivalent to 12 oz. (341 ml) of beer, 5 oz. (142 ml) of wine, 3 oz. (86 ml) of sherry or port, 1.5 oz. (43 ml) of spirits. Each has the same effect on the liver whether taken alone or diluted.
f. Say a strict no to alcohol if you have hepatitis or any other form of liver disease.

Try to be in a well-ventilated room and wear a mask when exposed to chemicals and paints as the liver has to detoxify everything that we breathe. This happens especially during painting of the house, welding, or while spraying pesticides on plants.

The liver is perhaps the most taken-for-granted organ in the body. Few know about the critical functions it performs. And fewer still know about the ill consequences of a damaged liver.

Do regular exercises to keep your liver healthy. And do not neglect symptoms that might indicate a deteriorating liver.

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