

Fumes from burning crackers can trigger severe respiratory concerns

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Diwali is around the corner. While it is an auspicious and joyous festival that brings families and friends together over light, love, gifts, pictures, and sweets, it is also a festival that brings with it the specificity of burning crackers to mark the festivities. From kids to elders, everyone is nowadays well informed about the harmful effects of burning crackers that come with Diwali. Be it environmental or personal health-related concerns, crackers do way more harm than they do good. Among many other health risks, the bursting of firecrackers prominently increases air pollution and the chances of respiratory problems. While bursting crackers have become an integral part of this festival of lights, so has the air and noise pollution in recent years and the doubled-up respiratory issues.

The fumes & particulate matter (PM) that are released from burning of crackers triggers increase cough, sputum, throat irritation, breathlessness and also worsen pre-existing asthma, COPD, increases risk of respiratory infection etc. Elderly and children with Asthma & bronchitis are very vulnerable with 30 - 40% increase in their chest symptoms during Diwali needing emergency room visits. The fumes & particulate matter also end up staying in the atmosphere for very long time and enhance the risk of respiratory illness.

All types of crackers are composed of chemical components Viz. base used for burning such as charcoal, Sulphur & potassium nitrates, Chlorate and perchlorate, Magnesium, Nitrogen dioxide, Aluminum, lead, carbon monoxide and various metals salts added to give variety of colors. These chemicals produce lot of reactive oxygen species, which in turn induce oxidative stress in the lungs resulting in powerful cellular and inflammatory response. These are harmful to the respiratory systems and lead to severe short term and long-term health concerns. These chemical substances if inhaled can accumulate and eventually, damage the functioning of the body.

The already deteriorated air quality and the rising air pollution take a deeper plunge during Diwali, further aggravating the already existing health concerns. Air pollution is well known to be major danger for respiratory problems. High levels of PM less than 2.5um that stay suspended in the air due to air pollution are capable of advancing deep into the lungs and affecting the respiratory system. These particles also tend to impair the immune system which leads to recurrent infections that in turn leads asthma. This dysfunctioning also damages the lungs which also leads to breathing problems and asthma. Air pollutants affect health in more than one way. From simple to serious health concerns, from biochemical and physiological to breathing difficulties, cough and aggravation of respiratory as well as cardiac disorders. Air quality affects the health of our lungs and the entire respiratory system in particular.

There is a dire need to execute serious measures that gradually ease the problem of air pollution during Diwali and make sure that the citizens have access to relatively cleaner air to breathe and can avoid respiratory problems that they are prone to due to the extreme pollution triggered by the burning of crackers during Diwali. Citizens themselves need to take steps on individual levels and avoid crackers for the larger good said Dr. Ramesh B R, Consultant Pulmonology, Columbia Asia Referral Hospital Yeshwanthpur

While it is not possible to have a zero pollution Diwali, but if every person makes an attempt to prevent or reverse pollution and the related health concerns, then the situation might improve a little. Some tips that one can keep in mind to avoid letting your the respiratory system gets affected include:

If possible, avoid as much contact with the polluted air as possible and stay away from crackers. Stay indoors. Keep the doors and windows around you closed. This is especially necessary for pregnant women, newborns, kids, as well as the elderly, and those with chronic conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, etc.

For those who have pre-existing health issues like asthma or bronchitis must make sure that they are regularly taking their medicines especially during the Diwali period to let the symptoms stay under control and to also avoid sudden attacks. Those who have asthma must also keep their inhalers along at all times. If possible, go out on short vocation of avoid the pollution of Diwali.

In case of increase in any signs of breathlessness shooting up, reach out for medical aid at the earliest possible.

When absolutely necessary to step out, wear masks to prevent particles from entering directly and causing irritation of the throat or in breathing. Prefer N-100 rated face masks, or confirm about them beforehand with your doctors.

Try not to exercise outdoors during this period as the air tends to have particles suspended for sometimes in the air and heavy breathing after a workout can make a way for these particles to get in.

Maintain a healthy life style and nutritious diet to strengthen your immune system. Do not consume too much of oily food items as an excess of oil can upset digestion and increase chances of suffocation.

Stay hydrated. Consume a lot of water constantly.

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