

Surviving dengue intelligently

We separate the facts from myths about alternative treatments and magic cures for those battling dengue

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Four out of five patients who walk in to Dr. Sharat Kolke's clinic at Kurla West reach out to home remedies before they come in to be treated for dengue. While the senior general physician, who specialises in internal medicines, prescribes antibiotics to attend to the symptoms (high fever), many of his patients, he shares, have their own home remedies. A popular one being: a mix of papaya leaves and goat milk, which is said to supposedly stabilise the platelet count. Oblivious of the unscientific line of treatment, they even ask Kolke if he could help them in sourcing the said ingredients of this humbug cure.

As the debilitating viral disease transmitted by the Aedes mosquito spreads in the city, victimising even celebrities like Vidya Balan, Zareen Khan and Sooraj Pancholi, it's imperative that we list the precautions, distinguish the facts from the myths and get experts to share the ideal line of treatment. "This viral infection is characterised by a high-grade fever and a drop in platelet count. This condition worsens in the first few days following the onset of fever. The drop is very unpredictable and can range from a lakh to as low as 1000 (The average normal count is between 1.5 lakhs

to 5 lakhs). So far, there is no cure for dengue fever. The disease runs its own course and recovery is seen in more than 99 per cent of patients," informs Kolke.

Being inflicted by dengue leads to various complications like a drop in the platelet count, bleeding tendencies, liver and renal failure and lung complications. And in the absence of anti-dengue drugs, a range of alternative dietary options suggest kiwi, dragon fruit, papaya leaf extract and goat's milk. But the authenticity of these dietary measures is questionable. "These may be helping psychologically but there is no evidence that it truly does work. Today, it is papaya leaf, tomorrow there'll be 10 more in the market. One must understand that in dengue, there is a sharp drop in platelet count on day 3 and 4, then it naturally picks up from day 6 and 7, even if you don't alter your diet. So chances are, that consuming these alternate supplements coincides with the body's natural course. The count was going to go up regardless," says Dr Khusrav Bajan, consultant physician and intensivist, PD Hinduja Hospital.

PAPAYA FOR PLATELET?

A tropical remedy for this tropical disease — there's even a YouTube video that shows how to extract

papaya leaf juice to cure dengue.

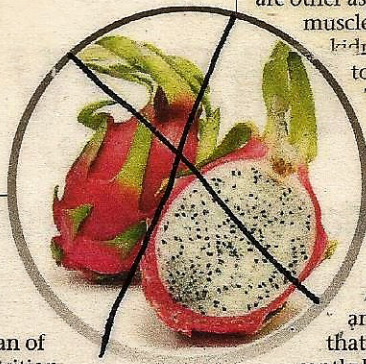
Clinical nutritionist Dr. Nupur Krishnan of Bio-Logics Nutrition Clinic swears by the remedy. "A recent study was submitted at The National Center for Biotechnology Information that claims that papaya leaves are packed with enzymes like chymopapain and papain that normalise the platelet count, attend to clotting, liver function and repair liver damage caused by dengue. The young leaves from a fruit bearing papaya plant should be used," she adds. Dr. Kolke would, however, beg to differ. He says, "There are a few studies published regarding the use of papaya leaf extract in dengue especially with respect to low platelets and the results have been equivocal. So, there is definitely no clear evidence to suggest that this extract helps in faster recovery than a placebo. On the other hand,

I have seen many patients who consume these juices or extracts develop stomach ache, vomiting and diarrhea, which adds to the stress of the patient and the treating physician." Dr. Bajan also urges patients to refrain from this line of treatment. "Dengue is stressful on the abdomen and liver and papaya leaf juice is heavy on these organs, so in fact, you are doing more harm than good by consuming it," he explains.

KIWI AND DRAGON FRUIT

Doctors say that these fruits play a role in the illness like most other fruits. They are rich in Vitamin C, anti-oxidants, lycopenes, and fibre and boost the immunity to some extent. "In dengue, you can't focus on the platelet count alone — there are other aspects like WBC count, muscle weakness, liver and kidney conditions that need to be looked at as well.

There is no harm in consuming these fruits but you can't just rely only on them," says Dr. Bajan.



TULSI AND BASIL LEAVES

Ask your grandmother and even she will agree that these leaves can significantly boost immunity. "Tulsi and basil also are said to possess anti-viral properties, but a more detailed scientific evaluation is needed to ascertain their role in dengue," says Dr. Kolke.

DRINKING GOAT MILK

Last year, the doctors at Delhi's AIIMS discredited the benefits being attributed to goat milk in increasing platelet count in dengue patients.

"Goat milk has great immunity benefits but it depends on how the goat was milked. If it was done in an unhygienic manner, it can do more harm than good," says Dr. Krishnan. Another concern with consuming raw milk is the chance of developing bacterial disease. "Even though raw goat milk is said to



be beneficial for dengue due to the high concentration of selenium in it, consumption of raw milk can lead to serious bacterial diseases like brucellosis and non-TB mycobacterial infection which can turn out to be more dangerous than dengue," informs Dr. Kolke.

Dr. Bajan believes that doctors often give in to their patients' demand for alternate medicines. Also, since a doctor has no control beyond the consulting room, it becomes the patient's responsibility to ignore hearsay. "I don't recommend these cures and would also advise people not to scramble for them," he adds.

