

PROTECTING CHILD SIGHT

Simple measures to avoid avoidable blindness

MD RAJIB HOSSAIN

There are many reasons why hundreds of thousands of children across the country are missing out on a childhood. Among the causes, blindness is most important one. But it is very unfortunate that the majority of these children suffer from either preventable or easily curable blindness. Medication or surgery can help them to regain the gift of sight by the mercy of Allah.

It is a matter of great regret that most of us do not know that how simple measures treat and prevent blindness in children. Our poor community think much for the treatment costs of eye diseases. They are not willing to go to eye surgery even it is provided free of cost. In a report, the World Bank states that the treatments available for prevention and cure for blindness are amongst the cheapest and most cost effective of all health care interventions, especially when measured against the cost in lost productivity and lifelong that is associated with the loss of sight.

Blindness and seeing difficulty

Some children are born blind. Others become blind during early childhood, or later. A national study by International Centre for Eye Health, UK and Child Sight Foundation (CSF) revealed that around 40,000 children are blind in Bangladesh. The children who are born blind are mainly due to hereditary (diseases from parents to children) cause. Cataract (the condition where the lens of the eye gradually becomes hard and opaque) is the commonest cause of child blindness in Bangladesh (31 percent). Although most of us think that cataract is a disease of elderly, it causes blindness of one in every three children.

Around 12,000 children are needlessly blind from cataract, are treatable. A child may be born with cataracts (congenital cataract) or s/he may develop cataracts during the first few years of the (developmental cataract).

In our country, another preventable cause of blindness in children is vitamin A deficiency which leads to scarring and opacity of the cornea (transparent front part of the front of eyeball). Vitamin A deficiency principally affects children under 6 years. Most of Vitamin A deficiency is the result of an inadequate diet, improper breast-feeding, severe diarrhoea, and measles infection. Children may be blind due to other causes like trachoma, amblyopia, and glaucoma.

Many more children are not blind but do have problems seeing things clearly. The family may not realise that a child may have problem of sight until they notice s/he has difficulty threading a needle, finding head lice, or reading letters on the blackboard at school. Often these children can see much better with simple eyeglasses or a magnifying glass. Another study suggests that there are almost 10,000 children with some degree of visual impairment in every million population, the majority of whom just need glasses to see clearly.

Symptoms indicating sight problems

1. Eyes/eyelids are red, have pus, or continually form tears.
2. Eyes look dull, wrinkled, cloudy, or have sores or other obvious problems.
3. One or both pupils (the black center of the eye) look gray or white.
4. By 3 months of age, the child's eyes still do not follow an object or light that is



A child, blind due to cataract.

5. By 3 months the child does not reach for things held in front of him, unless the things make a sound or touch him.
6. Eyes 'cross' or one eye turns in or out, or moves differently from the other. (Some eye-crossing is normal up to 6 months.)
7. Child squints (half shuts his eyes) or tips head to look at things.
8. Child is slower to begin using his hands, move about, or walk than other children, and he often bumps into things or seems clumsy.
9. Child takes little interest in brightly colored objects or pictures and books, or she puts them very close to her face.
10. Has difficulty seeing after the sun

sets (night blindness).

11. In school, the child cannot read letters on the blackboard or he cannot read small print in books, or gets tired or often gets headaches when he reads.

If the child shows any of these signs, his/her vision needs to be tested. Immediately we should consult with an eye specialist or referred to an eye hospital. Now-a-days, several organisations, NGOs are providing the cataract surgery, eye screening and other eye treatments free of cost. If it is not accessible, consultation with a local physician is strongly recommended.

Do's and Don'ts

Sometimes irrational use of medicine may cause serious damage of eye. Corticosteroid eye ointment should not be used often. Somebody may prescribe it for almost any eye irritation. This is a dangerous mistake. If the irritation is caused by a virus, the ointment could make the infection worse and lead to eye damage or blindness.

Out dated eye drops can also cause problems. Parents should be concerned about expiry date of medicine and not to use medicines irrationally, nor to use eye drops or ointment prescribed by someone other than clinicians.

Some home cures are dangerous. Some villagers try to treat blurred vision by putting human feces (shit) around the eye. This is unsafe and does not help, in fact, it could lead to dangerous infection. It is also dangerous to put lemon juice, urine, pieces of abalone shell, or Vicks ointment in the eye.

Injuries are important causes of visual loss in children. All children who have history of injury from blunt or sharp objects, or from chemicals, should be straight referred to an ophthalmologist.

We should keep sharp and pointed objects, bullets, explosives, acids, and lye away from children and teach them about their dangers and warn them about the danger of throwing closed bottles, cans, or pointed instrument.

Things to consider

The best way to prevent blindness is to try to keep children well fed, clean, and healthy. We should clean properly the babies' eyelids immediately after birth. When they get infected or have pus, clean them often with a clean cloth that is wet with clean water, and immediately consult with a physician.

In order to protect our child's sight, we should take proper measures and cares. We should ensure the required vitamin A for our baby as well as pregnant women, immunisation against measles and make sure of proper breast feeding for baby. In a nutshell, our adequate supervision can save one's life, restore one's sight. Thus we can prevent the sight of hundreds of children.

Treatment of cataract in children is a matter of urgency as early surgery increases the likelihood of better vision. The cataract does not need to be mature. If treatment is delayed, there is a risk of amblyopia (partial blindness) and irreversible visual impairment.

There may be complications after the cataract surgery. So proper follow up is also very important. Some children may require wearing glasses after surgery. But most of the children are not willing to use it and some parents think that wearing glass may be harmful or needless. A baby may go blind or remain blind simply for the lack of simple measures. So all these facts should be considered with great concern. Otherwise it will remain a threat to our nation.

Did You Know



DDT, the long-banned insecticide now approved to fight malaria

STAR HEALTH REPORT

DDT, the long-banned insecticide blamed for killing birds and other wildlife, is now approved for use indoors to fight malaria, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced recently.

"One of the best tools we have against malaria is indoor residual house spraying," said Dr Arata Kochi, director of the WHO malaria department. "Of the dozen pesticides WHO has approved as safe for house spraying, the most effective is DDT."

Indoor spraying with DDT is a cost-effective response to malaria, which kills about a million people annually, most of them children under five.

In parts of Africa and Asia where malaria-carrying mosquitoes spread the disease, 85 percent of home dwellers approached by health workers allow their houses to be sprayed, global health officials said at a news conference.

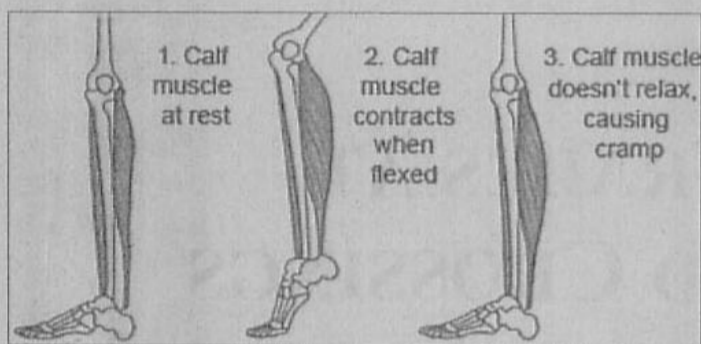
DDT came into common use in the 1930s as an agricultural insecticide. It became notorious after biologist and ecologist Rachel Carson's 1962 book "Silent Spring" exposed how DDT entered the food chain, killing wildlife and threatening humans.

In 1969, the National Cancer Institute announced findings that DDT could cause cancer, and a US federal ban was imposed in 1972.

Richard Tren, director of the group Africa Fighting Malaria, stressed the difference between agricultural DDT sprayed outdoors and the residual spraying meant to act like a giant mosquito net over individual houses.

"The environmental impact associated with spraying insecticides - whether it's DDT or other insecticides - indoors is minimal, it's negligible... This is as unrelated to 'Silent Spring' as anything," Tren said. "The science is very clear that there are no harmful human effects."

Tren said environmental groups in Africa support its use.



Treatment of muscle cramps with self-care

STAR HEALTH DESK

Muscle cramp is a sudden contraction of one or more of muscles of the body. The result can be intense pain and an inability to use the affected muscles.

Common causes of leg cramps are overuse and dehydration in warm weather. Injury, muscle strain or staying in the same position also may cause muscle cramps.

Writer's cramp affects the thumb and first two fingers of writing hand and results from using the same muscles for long periods. At home, you can develop muscle cramps in your hand or arm after spending long hours gripping a paintbrush or using a garden tool.

Other causes of muscle cramps may include circulatory or nerve problems. Some muscle cramps occur during rest. A common variety of muscle cramp occurs in calf muscles or toes during sleep.

You can usually treat muscle cramps with self-care measures. Signs and symptoms of a muscle cramp include:

- Sudden and sharp muscle pain (spasm, contraction), often in your legs
- A hard lump of muscle tissue that you can feel or is visible beneath your skin

When to seek medical advice Most people experience cramps only occasionally. These usually go away on their own and don't require medical treatment. However, if you experience frequent and severe muscle cramps, consult a doctor.

Treatment You can usually treat muscle cramps with self-care measures. Exercises can help to reduce chances of getting muscle

cramps. Making sure of drinking plenty of liquids also can help. For recurrent cramps that disturb sleep, medication to relax muscles can give relief.

Prevention

These steps may help prevent cramps:

Avoid dehydration: Drink plenty of liquids every day, generally at least six glasses of water or other beverages daily. The exact amount depends on what you eat, your sex, your level of activity, the weather, your health, your age and any medications you may be taking. Fluids help your muscles contract and relax and keep muscle cells hydrated and less irritable. Drink fluids before any exercise activity. During the activity, replenish fluids at regular intervals, and continue drinking water or other fluids after you are finished.

Stretch your muscles: Stretch before and after you use any muscle for an extended period. If you tend to have leg cramps at night, stretch before bedtime.

Self-care

If you have a cramp, these actions may provide relief:

Stretch and massage: Stretch the cramped muscle and gently rub it to help it relax. For a calf cramp, put your weight on your cramped leg and bend your knee slightly. If you are unable to stand, try pulling the top of your foot on the affected side toward your head while your leg is in a straightened position. This will also help ease a back thigh (hamstring) cramp. For a front thigh (quadriceps) cramp, use a chair to steady yourself and try pulling your foot on the affected side up toward your buttock.

Apply cold or heat: Use a cold pack to relax tense muscles. Use a warm towel or heating pad later if you have pain or tenderness, or take a hot bath.

Tips for coping with stress

TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

Unusual levels of stress can negatively impact the ability to accomplish personal goals and maintain good health. Challenges such as resolving a family crisis or losing weight become more difficult when stressors mount. Consider the following tips to help you reduce your stress.

Identify the stress triggers

Situations that create stress the condition we experience when demands exceed our ability to cope - are as unique as you are. Your genes, personality and life experiences all influence the stress response in your body. For example, one person may find it stressful to plan and host a holiday celebration for friends or family. Someone else might enjoy the creative aspects of hosting such an event and even find it gratifying.

Other causes of stress are obvious you lose your job or a parent dies. But don't overlook the daily hassles and demands that also contribute to your stress level - your daily commute or

having too much work to do. Over time such persistent little things can accumulate and wreak more havoc on your health than do the sudden big things. That is why it is important to recognise all of the causes. Try one or all of these techniques:

- Make a list of all the demands on your time and energy for one week. Some examples may include your job, volunteer work, driving kids to after-school activities or caring for an elderly parent. Then, on a scale of 1 (not very intense) to 5 (very intense), rate the intensity of stress that each demand causes.

Sit down and look at your stress recordings. Look closely at the events that you ranked as very stressful. Select one of them to work on using problem-solving techniques.

Improve your time management skills

Effective time management skills can help you identify goals, set priorities and minimise the stress in your life. Use these tips to improve your time management skills and lower your stress

- level.
- Create realistic expectations and deadlines for yourself, and set regular progress reviews.
- Throw away unimportant papers on your desk. Prepare a master list of tasks.
- Throughout the day, scan your master list and work on tasks in priority order.
- Use a planner: Store addresses and telephone numbers there. Copy tasks from your master list onto the page for the day on which you expect to do them. Evaluate and prioritise daily.
- For especially important or difficult projects, reserve an interruption-free block of time behind closed doors.

Overcome burnout

If you dread going to work or feel burned out or stressed over a period of weeks, your situation could affect your professional and personal relationships and even your livelihood. Overwhelming frustration or indifference toward your job, persistent irritability, anger, sarcasm and a quickness to argue are indicators of a condition that needs to be dealt with. Here are strategies

- you can use:
- Take care of yourself: Eat regular, balanced meals, including breakfast. Get adequate sleep and exercise.
- Develop friendships at work and outside the office. Sharing unsettling feelings with people you trust is the first step toward resolving them. Minimise activities with "negative" friends who only reinforce bad feelings.
- Take time off: Take a vacation or a long weekend. During the workday, take short breaks.
- Set limits: When necessary, learn to say no in a friendly but firm manner.
- Choose battles wisely: Don't rush to argue every time someone disagrees with you. Keep a cool head, and save your argument for things that really matter. Better yet, try not to argue at all.
- Have an outlet: Read, enjoy a hobby, exercise or get involved in some other activity that is relaxing and gets your mind off work.
- Seek help: If none of these things relieves your feelings of stress or burnout, ask a health care professional for advice.

Your Doctor



Prof Dr Tahminur Rahman
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Dear Doctor
What is factor VIII deficiency? Regards - Wahida Sultana Dhaka

Answer:
Factor VIII deficiency, also known as hemophilia A, is an inherited bleeding disorder caused by inadequate levels of factor VIII. Factor VIII is a key clotting factor needed for normal blood clotting to occur. A mild deficiency may cause no signs or symptoms. But a severe deficiency can be associated with bleeding problems.

Factor VIII also may be reduced in other blood clotting disorders, such as von Willebrand's disease.

Dear Doctor
My wife has a high platelet count, and her doctor says she

has essential thrombocythemia. What can you tell me about this condition? She does not have any symptoms. Regards - Shahjalal Khan Chittagong

Answer:
Essential thrombocythemia is an elevated platelet count for which no cause can be determined. Blood platelets (thrombocytes) help form blood clots that control bleeding.

A normal platelet count ranges from 150,000 to 450,000 platelets per microliter. In very large numbers, platelets may cause blockage (thrombosis) in blood vessels and bleeding problems. People diagnosed with thrombocythemia have platelet counts that exceed 600,000 platelets per microliter.

Some people with this disorder have no signs or symptoms. Others may have blood clots, bleeding episodes, such as bleeding from the nose, gums or gastrointestinal tract, heart attack, stroke.

Essential thrombocythemia is diagnosed by blood tests that show a sustained increase in platelets not due to another condition. Treatment may not be required in people without complications. But a doctor may recommend periodic checks of blood platelets. When needed, treatment may include low-dose aspirin to reduce clotting risk, medications, such as interferon or hydroxyurea (Hydrea, Droxia), to lower platelet count.

Send health related queries to Your Doctor, Star Health, The Daily Star, 19, Karwan Bazar, Dhaka 1215 or e-mail your problem to starhealth@thedailystar.net

HEALTH NEWS

ICD implanted at BSMMU

STAR HEALTH DESK

An ICD has been implanted recently in a patient at Cardiology department of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), Dhaka - says a press release.

An implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) is a device that is implanted in the chest to monitor for and, if necessary, correct abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias). ICDs are mainly used to treat two forms of abnormal heart rhythms, both of which occur in the ventricles, or lower pumping chambers of the heart.

If the ventricles begin to beat too quickly (ventricular tachycardia), the device may emit low-energy electrical pulses that

allow the heart to regain its normal rhythm. If the tachycardia progresses to a very rapid, life-threatening rhythm that causes the ventricles to quiver rather than beat (ventricular fibrillation), the device may deliver a relatively stronger jolt to reset the heart rate (defibrillation).

A team headed by Prof Dr K M H S Sirajul Haque implanted ICD on Mrs Roksana Begum, 47 from Nayabazar, Dhaka. The patient was diagnosed as hypertensive with recurrent non-sustained ventricular tachycardia with diabetes mellitus.

It was the first implantation at BSMMU. Dr Abdullah Al Jamil was among the team while Dr Robin Chakrabarty guided the technical expertise.