

# Staying healthy in old age

Dr Zubair Khaled Huq

Persons aged 60 years and above are considered as senior citizens. Various statistics show that the number of elderly population in Bangladesh is approximately 13 million which represents 8 percent of the total population and the average life expectancy is about 72 years.

The elderly should appear clean and well groomed. Failure to bathe, brush teeth or wear clean clothes indicate an inability to keep up with daily routine. This may be due to physical weakness, dementia or just depression. They may also be absent-minded, like leaving things on the stove and forgetting about them. These are danger signs indicating that care is required.

Make sure the lighting in the house is bright, especially in the living room and bathrooms. Narrow staircases and slippery front steps are also difficult to navigate. Banisters are essential. Supporting bars need to be embedded near the toilet and bathing areas. High commode in toilets is mandatory, otherwise the chances of accidental falls and fractures are greater.

Good nutrition is essential for immunity and strong muscle to prevent falls. To monitor nutrition, keep an eye on the weight, the quality of skin, hair and nails. Older adults may suffer from malnutrition even



when they can financially afford an adequate diet. Medications, illness or a recent hospitalisation may dull taste and reduce the appetite. Diet restrictions (on salt, sugar, oil, fluid and spices) owing to diseases may make the food unappetising and inadvertently limit intake. Social isolation and depression can also lead to people eating less.

We all have memory lapses and these are greater and more frequent with increasing age.

Memory loss is abnormal if it extends to names of close relatives (children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews), the way to the neighborhood shop or dosages of regular medications. Medical evaluation is required at this point.

Lifestyle changes and chronic diseases occur with ageing. It is important that all medical details and prescriptions are filed chronologically. This should then be placed in an accessible place.

Medical checkups and visits to the doctors should be scheduled regularly. Medical containers should be neatly labelled. If tablets are in strips, the person should be able to distinguish one medicine from another. Some medications may look very similar and it is possible to make disastrous and life-threatening mistakes.

Hearing and eyesight should be checked regularly and timely corrective measures to be taken.

Hearing loss and partial loss of eyesight leads to dependency and feelings of social isolation. Cataract surgery and hearing aids often are lifesavers.

Sleep disturbances are common in older adults. In some individuals, it may be because of Alzheimer's, when the sleep-wake cycle is disturbed, leading to daytime drowsiness and night-time restlessness. In many others, it may be because of medications, snoring (obstructive sleep apnoea), restless legs or just depression.

Good sleep can be promoted with exposure to bright sunlight in the morning; restricting or decreasing the intake of caffeine (tea or coffee); adjusting medication with the help of the doctor so that any tablets with a stimulatory effect are taken in the morning and medically treat any diseases that might interfere with normal sleep.

Physical activity for at least an hour a day should be encouraged. Walking will help with appetite, lifestyle diseases, depression, dementia and sleep disturbances. It helps to control diabetes. It will also entail some social activity as they will meet other people.

A little extra effort will pay off in the long run to make old age hassle free for everyone, both the elderly and the young adult.

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## DIAGNOSIS

### Scurvy can be mistaken for rheumatologic disorders

Dietary vitamin C deficiency was identified in 10 patients previously suspected to have juvenile idiopathic arthritis, vasculitis, or chronic nonbacterial osteomyelitis.

Scurvy is seldom suspected in children presenting with arthritis or extremity problems. A case series describes 10 children in Seattle (ages 3–20 years, 9 males) over 4 years who were found to have scurvy after referral to a rheumatology service for evaluation of lower extremity pain, limp, or refusal to bear weight. Among the findings:

- Other symptoms included ecchymoses (5 patients), petechiae, myalgias, polyarthralgia, gingivitis, epistaxis, sores in the mouth, anaemia, and corkscrew hairs. One patient had arthritis.
  - Reasons for referral were suspected juvenile idiopathic arthritis, vasculitis (Henoch-Schönlein purpura), and diffuse nonbacterial osteomyelitis.
  - Eight patients had autism, developmental delay, or both. Most patients had limited diets that lacked fruits and vegetables.
  - Erythrocyte sedimentation rate and C-reactive protein levels were elevated in 9 patients. Haematocrit values were low in all 10 patients; platelet counts were normal.
  - In none of the diagnostic radiographs was scurvy offered as a potential diagnosis.
  - Magnetic resonance imaging showed diffuse sub-periosteal fluid oedema. Scurvy was mentioned as a possibility in three of eight studies.
  - Ascorbic acid levels were below normal in all in whom it was measured.
  - Symptoms responded to supplemental vitamin C in all patients.
  - Time to diagnosis ranged from 1 to 47 months.
- These cases demonstrate that subpopulations of patients may have nutritional deficiencies and that scurvy can mimic inflammatory conditions. Taking dietary histories is important in all our patients; had that been done sooner, the patients in this report could have received a diagnosis sooner.

## HEALTH bulletin



### Weight loss surgery reduces the risk of skin cancer

Weight loss surgery (otherwise known as bariatric surgery) is associated with a distinct reduction in skin-cancer risk, a study published in JAMA Dermatology shows. This finding can be described as a key piece of evidence that substantiates the connection between weight loss and malignant skin cancer.

That obesity is a risk factor for several types of cancer is well known. The same applies to the fact that people's risk level can be lowered by means of an intentional weight reduction. However, the evidence for a connection between obesity and weight loss on the one hand and, in particular, malignant skin cancer on the other has been limited to date.

The findings support the idea that obesity is a risk factor for malignant skin cancer, including melanoma, and indicate that weight loss in individuals with obesity may reduce their risk for this severe form of cancer.

## Is arsenic a threat to the Bangladeshi livelihoods?

Dr Muhammad Torequl Islam

Arsenic poisoning is a global health issue affecting millions of people worldwide. It naturally occurs with ubiquitous distribution throughout the earth's crust, groundwater, air and food products. This metalloid propagates into the environment through weathering and mining processes, volcanic activity, arsenic ores with gold, lead, cobalt, nickel and zinc. Chronic arsenic toxicity occurs through contaminated drinking water, erosion of land sources and contaminated wells and aquifers.

Acute arsenic toxicity manifests with gastroenteritis followed by hypotension and vesicle damage. Doses under 5 mg results (within minutes to hours after ingestion) in garlic breath odor, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal and chest pain, loss of balance, tachycardia, fever and renal failure (1 to 12 hours after exposure). 4 to 48 hours after exposure, port wine hue urine, reddish stained conjunctiva, jaundice, liver and spleen tenderness, heart block, asystole and weakened mees' lines. Arsenic poisoning also causes dehydration and volume loss and electrocardiogram (ECG) abnormalities.

Chronic exposure to arsenic results in multiple dermatologic signs such as prominently diffuse or spotted hyperpigmentation (raindrop appearance), palmer-planter hyperkeratosis, eczematoid

lesions, warts, alopecia, basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, hyperkeratosis, skin cancer (especially in palms, soles, and abdomen), non-specific abdominal pain, gangrene of the extremities (blackfoot disease), lung and bladder cancer etc.

Arsenic is especially common in the rocks of the Himalayas, from where the Ganges and other



great rivers carry it to the heavily populated plains of South and Southeast Asia. Most of the world's arsenic is locked up in mineral compounds underground, but mining and coal burning have released many tons into the environment. Rice, legumes and vegetables grown in the fertile lands of Bangladesh are the common foods of the Bangladeshis. Moreover, Bangladesh is a riverine country.

Recent scientific evidence suggests that rice is the efficient scavenger of arsenic as it takes up 10-20 times as much as other cereal grains — because it is the only grain traditionally grown in fields that are under water. Flooding makes soil conditions anaerobic, which causes arsenic to convert from bound and stable forms into more mobile ones.

On the other hand, arsenic has a similar chemical structure of phosphate and silicon, which allows it to sneak through the same pathways that plants use to absorb these important nutrients. Once inside, it becomes embedded in the roots, shoots, leaves and — particularly important for human health — the seeds. It accumulates most in the husk, the outer covering of the seed that is left intact in brown rice. Thus, there is a well-balanced arsenic cycle in the Bangladeshi lifespan.

Notably, Bangladesh has high rates of exposure (with an estimated 27 million individuals) through drinking water with contamination levels greater than 50 parts per billion (ppb), where the World Health Organisation labels safe arsenic drinking levels at less than 10 ppb. Therefore, how arsenic is threatening the Bangladeshi livelihoods from generation to generation is a burning question now-a-days.

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### Best drinks for weight loss

If you are counting calories, it is important to watch what is in your glass as well as what is on your plate. Choosing the right beverage and keeping an eye on how much you pour can help curb your appetite and cut calories.

**Water:** Replacing sweetened soft drinks with water will cut hundreds of calories from your diet each day. Drinking two glasses of water before a meal may also help you feel full faster, so you won't eat as much.

**Skim or soy milk:** Beverages that are low in calories but high in nutrition are good options when you are trying to lose weight. Skim and soy milk both fit that bill. Plant-based milk substitutes, like almond milk, typically have fewer calories than cow's milk but less protein, so they are not necessarily better for weight loss.

**Green tea:** It is an excellent choice when you are looking for a little boost. Not only is it calorie-free, but some research suggests green tea extract may help with weight loss. The benefit appears to last only a few hours, so it may help to enjoy some green tea at least twice a day.

**Vegetable juice:** Vegetable juice is as nutritious as fruit juice, with fewer calories. One cup of tomato juice has 41 calories, compared to 122 for orange juice.

**Black coffee:** When you need a shot of caffeine, coffee is a better choice than soda or energy drinks. Black coffee is calorie-free and rich in antioxidants. Studies show that drinking moderate amounts of coffee (about 3 to 4 cups a day) may improve your mood and help your concentration.



### Common signs and symptom of heart attack include -

Chest pain or discomfort (angina) which can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain in the center of the chest

Lightheadedness or fainting

Shortness of breath, which can occur with or without chest pain

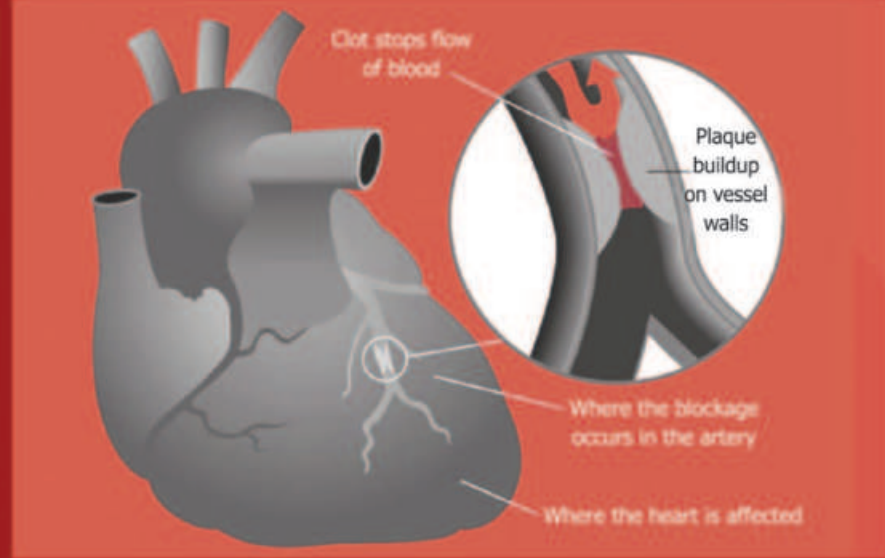
Discomfort in the upper body including the arms, neck, back, jaw, or stomach

Nausea and vomiting

Women (and some men) may have atypical symptoms such as abdominal distress, nausea, and fatigue, without chest pain

#### If having a heart attack,

- Call emergency right away & chew an adult-size (325 mg) non-coated aspirin
- Angioplasty, also called percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI), Is a procedure that should be performed within 90 minutes of a full thickness (STEMI) heart attack
- Fibrinolytic ("clot-busting") therapy should be given within 30 minutes of a heart attack if PCI is not available



**Acute coronary syndrome (ACS)** refers to a group of conditions due to decreased blood flow in the coronary arteries such that part of the heart muscle is unable to function properly or dies



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