

# Breaking taboos to improve menstrual health

STAR HEALTH DESK

Menstruation is a topic most women do not want to discuss very open. Plenty of misconceptions and false beliefs regarding menstruation are still prevailing in the society, especially in the poor communities. Cost involvement to maintain menstrual hygiene and lack of knowledge, healthy attitude and practice lead to poor menstrual health causing physical problems as well as economic loss.

In order to assess the social and cultural constructs of poor menstrual health in poor urban communities, a qualitative study along with a quantitative survey was conducted in three slums in Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh by WaterAid, an organisation with the mission of transforming lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. There are diverse variations in the perception about menstruation among the respondents of the survey, who are mostly women.



A large number of women use cloth for cleanliness protecting the bloodshed. In many instances, clothes are reused without proper cleaning. Use of sanitary napkin is extremely low due to inability to afford them.

Such unhealthy practices and inadequate or poor access to reproductive health services lead to various physical problems in women like prolonged

abdominal cramp, lack of appetite, physical weakness, white discharge, itching, heavy bleeding which might cause anaemia and fungal or bacterial infections in the genital tract.

There is also wide gap between the affordability of the families and the cost of available hygiene products. About three-fifths of the respondents mentioned that they will purchase

hygienic products if they get it in a lower price.

Findings of the research strongly suggest that targeted programme is extremely important in different levels of the society which could address prevailing malpractices of menstrual hygiene management. The following recommendations could help improve menstrual health of

women in Bangladesh:

- Effective knowledge transfer activities could improve prevailing misconceptions, social and cultural constructs associated with bad practices. Formation of discussion groups among women, young girls and peer learning strategy may work better in the slum context.

- Girls can be provided with technical training on how to make clean sanitary napkins and provided with material to make them. Efforts should also be taken to produce re-usable products which will bring the price down.

- Access to safe water and sanitation has to be ensured for all. Because, low access to sanitation aggravates the overall situation and is correlated to poor menstrual hygiene management.

- As men mainly control resources and decisions at the family level, efforts to change their attitude about the importance of improved menstrual hygiene management may add value to the programme.

## HEALTHCARE

### How to communicate with your doctor

DR SHAGUFA ANWAR

When you visit a physician, one of the most important things to do is communicating with your doctor properly so that s/he gets a true picture of your condition. This assists the doctor in the diagnosis process.



It is important to let your doctor know when the symptoms started, how long they have been going for and whether they are continuous or do they come and go. If you have noticed any triggers for your symptoms, they also need to be described. In order to give your doctor a better picture of how your symptoms affect you, it is helpful to be specific about your symptoms e.g. sharp pain, sudden nausea, dull ache etc. and perhaps even rate them on a scale of 1 to 10.

During discussing, it is also necessary to mention any medicine, supplements or herbal remedies you are currently taking as well as any recent surgeries or current treatments by other doctors.

It is also important to be honest with your doctor and put aside any embarrassment as your information often forms the sole basis for the doctor's diagnosis. Do not hesitate to mention any recreational drug use, alcohol abuse or sexual matters which may be affecting your health.

The writer is the General Manager, Business Development, Apollo Hospitals Dhaka. E-mail: shagufa.anwar@apollodhaka.com

### HEALTH bulletin

**The largest and most affordable source of Potassium is in potatoes**

Research presented at the American Dietetic Association's (ADA) Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo (FNCE) demonstrates that potatoes provide significantly better nutritional value than most other raw vegetables. Per serving, white potatoes were the largest and most affordable source of Potassium of any vegetable or fruit.

**Low vitamin B12 levels may lead to brain shrinkage, cognitive problems**

Older people with low levels of vitamin B12 in their blood may be more likely to lose brain cells and develop problems with their thinking skills, according to a study published in medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Foods that come from animals, including fish, meat, especially liver, milk, eggs and poultry are usually sources of vitamin B12.

## Know the facts about Folliculitis

DR MIZANUR RAHMAN KOLLOL

Folliculitis is the inflammation of hair follicles. It starts when hair follicles are damaged by friction from clothing, blockage of the follicle or shaving. In most cases, damaged follicles are then infected with the bacteria — Staphylococcus. It may also occur due to fungal infections, scabies, pediculosis (body lice) and irritant chemicals.

The condition develops rapidly and involves more and more hair follicles. It usually affects adult males, but females only occasionally and spares children.

It causes burning and itching, white-headed pimples around one or more hair follicles. Usually there is no pain and the lesions persist with chronicity. The affected area looks congested, swollen and infiltrated. Most cases of folliculitis are superficial which affect the upper part of the hair follicle. Superficial folliculitis often clears by itself in a few days, but deep or recurring folliculitis may need medical treatment.

Mild cases of folliculitis will likely go away on their own. Persistent or recurring cases are likely to require treatment. The lesions may be cleaned with soap and water or with potassium permanganate. The cases are treated with appropriate antibiotic recommended by a physician. Resistant cases may be treated with fractional x-ray therapy.

The writer is a Resident Surgeon at Dhaka National Medical College & Hospital.

## A call for XP society

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Xeroderma Pigmentosum (XP) is a rare genetic disease that has no medical cure. Individual with XP have to avoid the sun and bright lights, because their bodies do not have the ability to repair skin damage occurring due to exposure to ultraviolet rays. It is quite terrifying to know that one's child is diagnosed with such a disease, XP that has no treatment.

Tarequzzaman Khan and Latifa Akhter Moni, are the hapless and unfortunate parents of a seven-year-old Sraboni Zaman Turna and three-year-old Monimuzzaman Khan, who were diagnosed with this rare disease at their early age.

The disease affects both males and females. It makes its presence felt through symptoms — unusually dark freckles or severe sunburns following a brief exposure to sunlight. Undiagnosed and untreated XP can lead to early onset of skin cancer and blindness. In addition, approximately 20 percent of the people with XP develop progressive neurological disease. The treatment mainly consists of taking precaution against UV ray exposure.

Considering all these odds and horrible situation, Turna and Monim's parents trying to form a society exclusively for the XP patients, experts, parents as well as the health activists who are interested about this rare disease. Tarequzzaman said, "We want a common platform to work together to ensure that every child with the disease (XP) will receive treatment or rehabilitation." Patients, interested persons or organisations are requested to communicate with the initiator Tarequzzaman at this number +8801712263896 or e-mail to [xpsociety.bd@gmail.com](mailto:xpsociety.bd@gmail.com)

## Knowing for better living

**WORLD HEART DAY**  
29 September 2011

*One World, One Home, One Heart.*

- Take low fat diet
- Be physically active
- Ban smoking at your home
- Eat vegetables and fresh fruits
- Maintain healthy weight
- Consult your Doctor

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