

The partnership for maternal, newborn and child health

Global forum calls for urgent action to curb health inequities, cut maternal and child mortality

DR. TAREQ SALAHUDDIN, back from PMNCH at Johannesburg

More than 800 leaders and public health experts from around the world opened a landmark two-day meeting in Johannesburg to review new data and call for accelerated action to improve maternal, newborn and child health. The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) 2014 Partners' Forum was opened by Graça Machel, Chair of PMNCH and African Ambassador for Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed, who is making her first public appearance since the end of her mourning period after the death of her husband, Nelson Mandela.

"The world has made remarkable progress to improve health and expand opportunities over the past 14 years. Despite all efforts, there is still much more to be done," said Graça Machel. "Women and children have not been covered adequately. We must ensure that all women, adolescent girls, children and newborns, no matter where they live, are able to fulfill their rights



PHOTO: TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

to health and education, and realise their full potential."

In support of the UN Secretary-General's Every Woman Every Child movement, the Partners' Forum builds on two months of high-level meetings in Toronto, Prague, and Washington, DC, where global leaders and health

experts met to discuss strategies to promote the health of women and children. At this Forum, leaders discussed steps to assist countries that have lagged behind in efforts to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, and made specific recommendations for how to

maintain the focus on women and children within the post-2015 development agenda.

Notably, participants also pledged their financial and policy support and a range of new resources to support the implementation of the new Every Newborn action plan (ENAP), a

roadmap to improve newborn health and prevent stillbirths by 2035.

Despite improvements, 289,000 women still die every year from complications at birth and 6.6 million children do not live to see their fifth birthday, including nearly 3 million newborns. At least 200 million women and girls are unable to access family planning services that would allow them to control when they have children.

The world has been especially slow in improving health outcomes for newborns. Globally, each year, 2.9 million newborns (first 28 days of life) die and 2.6 million are stillborn. Recent data published in The Lancet Every Newborn Series indicate that 15,000 babies are born and die every day without ever receiving a birth or death certificate. The accompanying analysis found that 3 million maternal and newborn deaths and stillbirths in 75 high burden countries could be prevented each year with proven interventions that can be implemented for an annual cost of only US\$1.15 per person.

RAMADAN RIDDLES

Answer to frequently asked questions

Q. Is fasting harmful when a woman is expecting a baby? Is it compulsory to fast while pregnant?
It is not compulsory to fast while pregnant, but the woman will either need to make up those fasts later or, if unable to do this, should perform Fidyah*. There is some medical evidence to show that fasting in pregnancy is not advisable. If a pregnant woman feels strong and healthy enough to fast, especially during the early part of the pregnancy, she may do so. If she does not feel well enough to fast, Islamic law gives her clear permission not to fast and to make up the missed fasts later.

Q. Can I use an asthma puffer during Ramadan?
Muslim jurists differ on this issue. Some leading jurists argue that using an asthma inhaler is not classified as eating or drinking, and is therefore permissible during fasting. Others argue that because the inhaler provides small amounts of liquid medicine to the lungs, it breaks the fast. Perhaps the former view is stronger, since the inhaler assists with breathing and helps the person to fast, which means abstaining from food and drink.

According to the first view, asthmatics may fast and use their inhalers whenever required during fasting. According to the second view, asthmatics with poor control of their disease are advised not to fast until good control is achieved. Others may alter their inhalers to those of a longer-acting variety so that fasting may be feasible. Please consult a doctor for further advice.

*Fidyah: a method of compensation in Islam for a missed fast of worship that must be otherwise fulfilled. If you are unable to fulfil a missed fast, for example due to an ongoing illness, you should feed a hungry person (two meals per day) if you are able to. Please consult an Islamic scholar for further details.

Source: National Health Service, UK

HEALTH bulletin

Choosing smart foods in summer

CHOWDHURY TASNEEM HASIN

In summer season, diet plays a crucial role in maintaining our health and wellbeing. Because, the air temperature and level of moisture favours some notorious bacteria to grow in the food and produce foodborne diseases that commonly cause diarrhoea.

It is also a season when we can get dehydrated easily due to excess sweat and perspiration in summer. Thus, a special summer diet consisting of light and healthy food and drinking plenty of water can help us staying fit and cool. The following tips will help us follow the way to healthy summer:

- At the time of excess sweating, we feel like reaching out for something cold. This is where we go wrong because anything extremely

low in temperature can constrict our blood vessels affecting the heat loss process from our body.

- We have to increase our water intake even in high humidity. At this humidity rate we do not sweat adequately due to which we cannot release heat efficiently from our body. That is the reason why we need to drink enough water at regular intervals even if we are not thirsty, to cool our system. Drink as much water as possible as the heat absorbs the water of our body and skin and if there is even slightest shortage, we might get dehydrated. So, we should try to limit or avoid beverages that are caffeinated, carbonated or high in sugar level which will produce heat at the time of digestion.

- We need to eat lot of fresh fruits and raw salads. Fruits and veggies are

easy to digest and high in water and mineral content which helps in hydration. We could easily try to start our day with fruits and if possible all country fruits like green mango, green coconut water, watermelon, muskmelon, pineapple, cucumber etc.

- Avoid fried and junk foods as they take time to digest and require a lot of water. Spicy foods can also increase body heat. So we should avoid taking hot and spicy food items as far as possible.

- Drink naturally cooling beverages like coconut water, lemon juice, buttermilk, sugarcane juice, etc. rather than aerated soft drinks, caffeine etc as they contain sugar and other preservatives which will produce heat at the time of digestion and act as diuretics (increase the flow of urine) thus can cause loss of water from the body.

- Curd is excellent for summers as it increases friendly bacteria in the gut and improves digestion and boosts immunity. Curd and other low fat dairy products will also help us remain cool and provide us with calcium and protein. It is a great and healthy alternative to ice-cream as they are packed with nutrients, vitamins and calcium which help to soothe ulcers, allergies and heat boils during the season.

The writer is the In-charge of Dietetics and Nutrition Department at United Hospital Ltd., Dhaka.



Did you know?

Glaucoma can affect babies, too

Glaucoma is an eye disease where fluid builds up inside the eye, creating pressure that damages the optic nerve and leads to vision loss. Glaucoma is largely diagnosed in the elderly people over 60 years. Thus, many people take it as a disease of elderly. But it can affect infants and children as well.

A baby can be born with glaucoma called congenital glaucoma or developed it after birth. Congenital glaucoma can occur as part of a syndrome of birth defects or due to unknown aetiology. In other cases, an older child develops glaucoma because of trauma to the eye, use of steroid eye drops, or surgery for a different eye condition, such as cataracts.

An infant with glaucoma may have symptoms like eyelid spasms, hazy eye, sensitivity to light and excessive tearing. Urgent action is required to prevent irreversible vision loss.

f b /StarHealthBD

Knowing for better living

Physical activity reduces the risk of osteoporosis, fracture and fall-related injuries

Eat calcium-rich food regularly

Sunbathe for at least 10-15 minutes daily

Take balanced diet regularly

Exercise regularly

Consult your doctor



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