

# Is mental health illness the next pandemic?

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One in five people in Bangladesh is affected by anxiety and depression. There is only one mental health professional for 100,000 people.

Like many other countries in the world, the Coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on population health in Bangladesh where millions are infected, and the largest epidemic death toll for decades. It has also disrupted tens of millions of lives including seasonal workers who could not travel or earn, children unable to attend schools or see classmates and friends, family, businesses with no customers in lockdown, and people left without the support networks they normally rely on to cope with lost jobs or broken relationships.

Before the COVID pandemic, 21% of the adult Bangladeshi population were already estimated to have a mental health issue, with 11% suffering from depression and anxiety. More recent studies during the pandemic have shown a big increase, with up to 70% of adults affected by sleep loss, loneliness or anxiety. Isolation, unemployment, broken relationships, personal loss and grieving due to the death of close friends and family members, and uncertainty regarding the future are all shaping increased anxiety and depression during the pandemic.

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 14,436 suicides took place in Bangladesh between March 2020 and



February 2021. And this is the sad tip of a big mental health iceberg, with millions of the population suffering from anxiety, depression, and trauma disorders (PTSD). Unfortunately, many without even realising that what they are going through is a disease, and like any physical health issue it can be managed through medical support and intervention.

Many sufferers are reluctant to reach out for help because mental illness or emotional distress is seen as a sign of weakness even though it is not, as there is a stigma attached to it.

While everyone is facing the hit, children and young adults are the most affected. At least 151 students have committed suicide since the school closure

in March 2020 till June 2021.

Sufferers also do not reach out because there are only a few solutions readily available. There are less than 2,000 mental health professionals in a country of more than 164 million people or around 1 per 1,00,000 people. Another major drawback is that these mental health providers are concentrated in urban areas, leaving 100 million in rural Bangladesh with limited support. However, the government is acting and making steady progress.

But to close the access gap, new solutions and innovative thinking are required. Recently, several NGOs have been established exclusively for mental healthcare, for example, Moshal Mental Health whose founder was acknowledged

with the Diana Award, and Lifespring have helped many corporate organisations provide mental health support to employees. Many healthcare companies have also extended their support to further strengthen the government's efforts.

In such a backdrop, we first need to create a culture where people can open up and express their pent-up frustrations so that no one feels on edge and resorts to something detrimental. As people feel shy to talk about mental health problems, healthcare providers need to come up with solutions that will keep the privacy and identity of the people suffering from mental health problems secure. Just like Digital Hospital's initiative to facilitate the vulnerable people with private and secure online doctor chat on mental health and wellbeing, there could many be other similar initiatives that will inspire people to share their problems related to mental well-being.

Moreover, our society, as a whole, needs to be more sympathetic towards everyone so that people do not feel afraid to talk about the problems they are going through. It is better to be late than never. And the time is now. With several digital solutions for mental health and wellbeing popping up, we need to remember that good mental health support can be made available to all.

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## NUGGETS



### Is it safe to eat poultry chicken?

The chicken dominates plates around the world. We eat more of it than any other protein. The average person has more than 98 pounds of chicken every year. But some poultry producers provide chemicals to feed the chickens in poultry that may have harsh repercussions on human health when consumed.

Here are few risks listed below:

#### Arsenic levels

For decades, poultry producers added the arsenic-based drug roxarsone to chicken feed. It made the chickens grow faster and gave their raw meat an attractive pink colour. This drug has not been on the market since 2011, but many other arsenic-based drugs are still part of chicken feed. Even at low levels, arsenic can cause cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. If you are concerned, stick to certified organic chicken, which does not allow arsenic in the feed.

#### Antibiotic risks

Some chicken producers put antibiotics in the feed or drinking water they give their flocks to control the disease. The medicines are not harmful to you or the chicken, but they can make you resistant to antibiotics you might need to fight your infections. If this concerns you, look for labels that say the chicken is antibiotic-free.

## HEALTH bulletin



### Every extra 1 cm in waist circumference increases odds of advanced fibrosis by 5%

New research being presented at the Annual Meeting of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD), held online this year, found a link between larger waistlines and the progression of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) in people with type 2 diabetes (T2D).

Each 1 cm increase in waist circumference was associated with a 5% higher likelihood of developing advanced fibrosis, a late stage of NAFLD - in which fat builds up in the liver, can progress to severe liver damage, including advanced fibrosis - potentially life-threatening scarring of the liver. It is already known that up to 15-20% of those with T2D have advanced fibrosis. But little is known about what effect, if any, it has on the complications of diabetes.

According to a study in Paris among 685 T2D patients, nephropathy is significantly more common in those with advanced fibrosis than the other T2D patients.

The study also found that every 1 cm increase in waistline was associated with a 5% increase in the likelihood of the participants developing advanced fibrosis. Higher levels of AST, a marker of liver damage, were also associated with higher odds of advanced fibrosis.

A large waist circumference is linked to metabolic syndrome and fat accumulation in the abdomen, which can lead to NAFLD.

## Common causes that give rise to headaches

STAR HEALTH DESK

Headaches are a frequent and uncomfortable condition that reduces the quality of life. Every day, many people suffer from headaches. A headache is characterised by discomfort in the head or face. It may be throbbing, persistent, intense, or dull. Here are some causes that can result in headaches.

#### Your vision is blurry

Focusing on something near your face may cause a headache. Also, things get hazy as you get closer if you're farsighted. It could be due to a short eyeball or a flat cornea.

#### You tense your neck and shoulders

Do you spend hours hunched over a computer or a phone? Such "tension headaches" can occur. Use a hot shower, use a heating pad, and take over-the-counter painkillers.

#### You are hungry

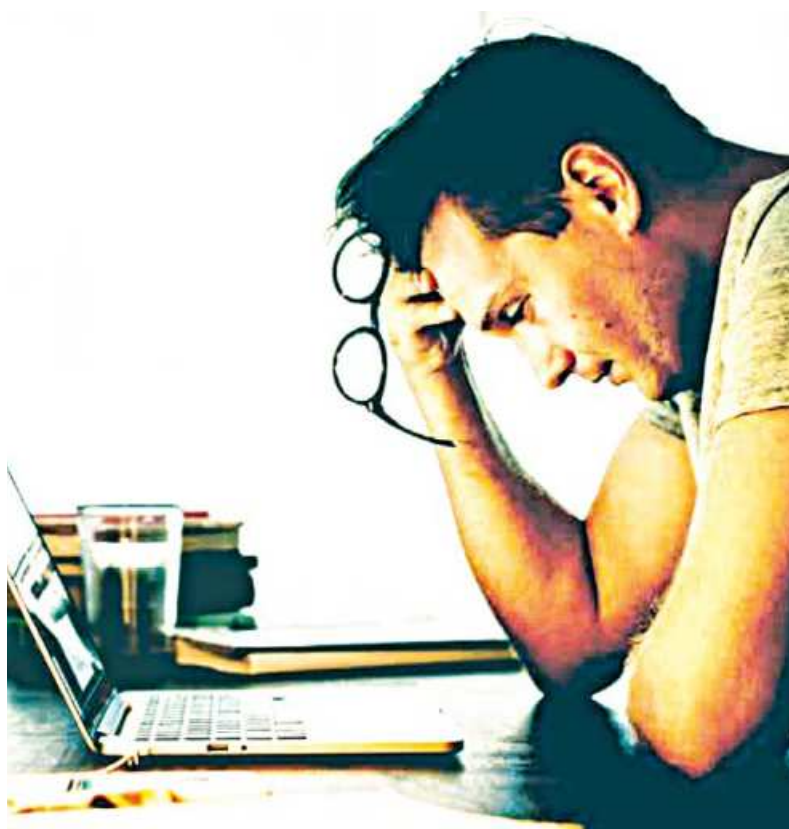
Maybe you have not had a meal in a while. It could give you low blood sugar, which triggers a headache. It might help to have several small meals instead of three big ones.

#### You skipped your morning coffee

Your body gets used to the caffeine and reminds you with a throbbing head if you forget to drink your regular cup. When coffee is not at hand, green or black tea or even dark chocolate will do.

#### You had sex

Dull aching in your neck or head may worsen with sexual excitement. Call your doctor immediately away if you experience a headache during or after sex, especially if it's new or abrupt.



#### Your sinuses are swollen

A simple cold can inflame hollow areas behind your cheekbones and forehead. The swelling could cause pain there that worsens when you bend over-over-the-counter drugs can often help you manage it.

#### You drank too much last night

Taking more than three or five drinks may cause a pounding head and a hangover because alcohol disrupts sleep and dehydrates the body. As a result, you might be weary and nauseous. Instead, rehydrate with water or broth.

#### You just ate ice cream

Sometimes called an "ice cream headache" or "brain freeze," it happens when you eat something icy, especially if you do it fast. It could be that the freezing temperature makes the blood vessels in your mouth shrink, which triggers pain signals to your brain. It usually goes in a minute or so. Prevention is simple: Eat frosty foods more slowly. Check what is causing your headache.

Source: WebMD

## Unique health insurance protects against 52 essential illnesses up to age 80

MetLife Bangladesh has recently launched a first-of-its-kind *Critical Illness Insurance Protection Plan* that offers customers financial protection for 52 common critical illnesses, including the leading causes of death in Bangladesh: heart attack, stroke, respiratory diseases, cancer and kidney diseases, says a press release.

This is the only health insurance plan in the country that provides financial protection of up to BDT 1 Crore till the age of 80 years against the highest number of critical illnesses. By paying premiums for a relatively shorter period (maximum 20 years from the date of purchase), customers and their families can receive insurance coverage for medical treatment or unfortunate death of the policyholder from critical illnesses or any other causes until the age of 80 years. If a policyholder reaches at the age of 80 years without making any claim, they will receive up to 100% policy coverage.

The product has been designed to reflect the health needs and financial priorities of the people of Bangladesh.

MetLife Bangladesh's Critical Illness Insurance Protection Plan will help customers manage medical treatment and recover from the physical, emotional and financial stress of these illnesses.

Considering the current prevalence of dengue fever, the health insurance plan provides additional financial protection against unfortunate death from the disease.

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evidence based  
treatment is the key  
to prevent further  
damage from  
Rheumatic Disorder