

## Help new mothers feel less sad by encouraging them to breastfeed!

DR NUR-A-SAFRINA RAHMAN

Postpartum depression (PPD), often known as “baby blues,” may occur among new mothers after giving birth. PPD can make a mother depressed, hopeless, lose interest in activities, and have problems connecting with their infant.

### PPD is caused by the following factors:

Pregnancy boosts oestrogen and progesterone production. A rapid decline in these hormones after giving birth may increase PPD risk. Changes in the levels of neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which regulate mood, might also alter a woman's emotions.

Remember that postpartum hormone fluctuations



affect women differently. Stress, a lack of support, prior mental health issues, and important life events may all induce PPD.

### How breastfeeding helps reduce PPD:

Breastfeeding helps both mother and child. Breast milk gives the finest nourishment and antibodies to prevent babies from major childhood illnesses and makes mothers happier, calmer, and less worried. Breastfeeding releases prolactin and oxytocin. Researchers believe oxytocin relaxes mothers and prolactin lessens their anxiety.

Researchers found that PPD was lowest in women who wished to and could breastfeed. Thus, breastfeeding requires a predetermined attitude, and counselling may help with this. The WHO and other experts advise breastfeeding babies from the first hour.

Patients with PPD should talk to their doctors about their worries. PPD can be treated with medication, therapy, and counselling. Finding reliable people and getting their support are also important. PPD can often be reduced with the help of therapy and peer support.

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A fistula operation at Hope Hospital in Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: HOPE FOUNDATION

## Repairing obstetric fistula in remote Bangladesh

DR IFTIKHER MAHMOOD

An obstetric fistula usually happens to poor, pregnant women in remote areas. If a dead baby stays inside the uterus for a long time, the blood flow to different parts of the reproductive organs is stopped, the different parts of the birth canal are damaged, resulting in a wound that creates a hole between the reproductive organs and the bladder and/or anus, resulting in the continuous leakage of urine or feces.

Fistula is a physically painful and psychologically damaging disorder. Women with fistulas are unable to have intercourse with their husbands due to the continuous leakage of urine and/or feces. They have bad body smells all the time. In almost all cases, their husbands abandon them, and they are even rejected by their parents or other close relatives.

Obstetric fistula is almost never seen in the developed world today due to improved obstetric care. It remains a significant cause of morbidity in Bangladesh and other developing countries where maternal health is lagging. Generally, most women, before developing obstetric fistula, experience labour pain for three days or more. These women are often from poor communities and do

not have access to good health care.

Often the deliveries are done by traditional birth attendants or family members. Many of them do not receive any prenatal care. Therefore, they have no prior knowledge of the size, position, and health risks of their unborn child and no prior preparation is made for delivery that may be obstructed or require cesarean section.

In rural areas where health awareness is low, obstetric fistula is not well understood and is considered a curse of fate and instead of helping they are blamed for the dreaded disease. Everyone considers them a social and family burden. The kinds of mental depression, anxiety and restlessness that a fistula patient experiences are terrible. Fistula-afflicted women have many other problems such as kidney disease, difficulty in walking due to nerve damage in legs etc.

Obstetric fistula is usually treated surgically. If an experienced physician is consulted within a short time after fistula develops, it can be cured without surgery with antibiotics. But for those who have fistula for a long time, only treatment is surgery. Fistula operation is complex and can only be performed by skilled surgeons.

Currently, fistula surgeries are performed in 17 hospitals across the country, among which Hope Hospital in Cox's Bazar is notable. Other institutions that perform fistula surgery in Bangladesh are Lamb Hospital, MAMM's Institute, Kumudini Hospital, Ad-din Hospital, BSMMU and some government medical college hospitals.

Fistula surgery is expensive. Almost all fistula surgeries done in the country, including those at Hope Hospital, are done free of charge, through help of donor agencies. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken a major initiative to make the country fistula free by 2030 with the technical support of UNFPA Bangladesh.

The Government of Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in maternal health and has received international recognition for the achievements. Now, it is the demand of the time to make the country free from fistula by 2030 by bringing all the fistula patients under treatment with the cooperation and collective efforts of all government and non-governmental organisations.

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## HAVE A NICE DAY Mr Vagabond: The superpower nerve

DR RUBAIUL MURSHED

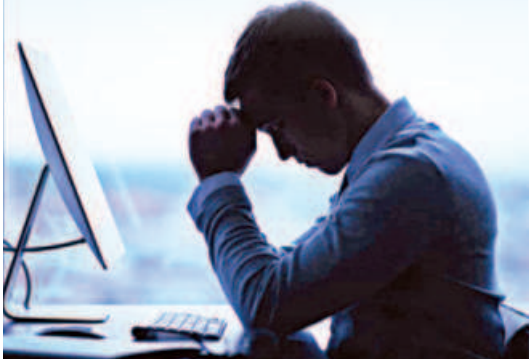
We all know that 'a crust eaten in peace is better than a banquet participated in stress and anxiety.' There is no such thing as a stress-free life. Today, vagus nerve massages are popular for stress relieve. But, in the early eighties, we focused more on 'vagotomy' to treat severe cases of peptic ulcer disease.

The Latin word vagus means "wandering" (the words vagrant, vagabond, and vague come from the same root). It supplies the nervous system, heart, lungs, and most of the intestines. The vagal nerves, the longest superpower cranial nerve, have the widest distribution in the body. They are the main nerves of our parasympathetic nervous system, that controls specific body functions such as digestion, heart rate, and immune system. These functions are involuntary, meaning you cannot consciously control them.

Our parasympathetic nervous system is a network of nerves that relaxes your body after periods of stress or danger. It counteracts your fight or flight system. It's how you develop a healthy stress response and become resilient. When stimulated, you feel calmer, more compassionate, and clearer. Stimulating the vagus nerve benefits your autonomic nervous system and mental health, which reduces neurophysiological experience of stress. It lowers our heart rate and blood pressure. It affects our limbic system in the brain, where emotions are processed.

Moderate neck and shoulder massage improves the functioning of vagus nerve. But a painful massage may not be a great choice because muscle pain may trigger the sympathetic nervous system, causing a "fight or flight" response.

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### INTERVIEW

## Prevention and regular check up for managing cancers

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

Gastrointestinal cancers are leading cause of cancer-related mortality and remains a major challenge for cancer treatment. They account for 26% of the global cancer incidence burden and 35% of all cancer-related deaths; in 2018, there were an estimated 4.8 million new cases and 3.4 million related deaths worldwide.

Recently Dr Foo Kian Fong, a medical oncologist at Mount Elizabeth Hospitals and Gleneagles Hospital, Singapore visited Bangladesh and shared some views with Star Health. His clinical interests are in gastrointestinal cancers.

Despite the combined administration of modern surgical techniques and chemoradiotherapy (CRT), the overall 5-year survival rate of gastrointestinal cancer patients in advanced stage disease is less than 15%, due to rapid disease progression, metastasis, and CRT resistance.

Dr Foo mentioned the recent advancement of immunotherapy, especially targeted immunotherapy



Dr Foo Kian Fong, medical oncologist at Mount Elizabeth Hospitals and Gleneagles Hospital, Singapore

in cancer treatment. Although expensive, they are promising and providing breakthrough treatment options. Immunotherapy has been developed in the last few years a lot and changing the whole scenario of cancer treatment which was not possible earlier. Some of the treatment modalities are still in experimental stage, but they are quite promising.

Hepatobiliary cancer is very common due to many reasons.

Dr Foo advised that lifestyle plays a vital role managing them. For example, fatty liver is quite a common condition due to urban lifestyle. Regular exercise and dietary modification can slow down the condition to a great extent. We can delay the damage to the liver by simple measures.

Quite often, the only treatment option for end stage liver disease is liver transplant. It is very expensive and is not available everywhere. But lifestyle changes can prolong the quality of life significantly in this regard.

Along with preventive measures like vaccination, healthy food habit and lifestyle modifications, Dr Foo suggests for regular check up (twice a year) for the early detection of cancer. It is very helpful to maximise the benefit of cancer treatment. Regular follow up is the reason why people get more benefit in cancer treatment in the developed world.

Dr Foo Kian Fong is a member of the American Society of Clinical Oncologist, European Society of Medical Oncologists and the Hong Kong College of Physicians.

## How to prepare for labour

Having a baby is a big life event that can feel overwhelming. There is a lot to consider, but preparation can make the move into parenthood easier.

### Ways to prepare for labour

Your body naturally prepares for labour on its own, but there are a few things you can do to help lower your stress.

### Make a birth plan

A birth plan is an outline of what you want for your delivery. This plan helps your doctor or midwife, nurses, and support people understand your personal wishes.

Be flexible and open to change, as births don't often go exactly as expected.

### Visit the hospital

Knowing what to expect and what to do can help you feel more comfortable on the day of the birth.



### Pack your bag

You will need supplies for both you and your baby at the hospital. Hospitals may have different rules about what they give to moms and what you will need to bring from home.



### Set up your nursery and home

Getting your home ready for your baby and making it a safe and

comfortable place is an important step in preparing for labour.



### Preparing for the cost of labour and a new baby


You will need to plan for the cost of your hospital stay and regular check-ups for you and your baby. Find out how much money you will need to pay for your delivery and doctor's visits.




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