

## Understanding anxiety: genetic factors, symptoms, and effective treatments explored

Anxiety is a mental health condition characterised by excessive, persistent worry or fear that interferes with daily life. It manifests in various forms, like generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, or specific phobias. While fear is a normal response, anxiety disorders involve intense, prolonged anxiety, often without a clear trigger.

Genetics can contribute to anxiety disorders, with studies suggesting a 30% likelihood of them running in families. Genetic variants in neurotransmitter-related genes like 5-HTT, 5-HT1A, and MAOA may increase susceptibility. However, a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental factors—traumatic experiences, stress, or other mental health conditions—also play a role in its development.

Symptoms range from physical manifestations like headaches, palpitations, and dizziness to psychological indicators such as constant worry, panic attacks, and avoidance behaviours.

Diagnosis involves a psychological evaluation comparing symptoms to diagnostic criteria, often found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Treatment commonly involves cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), medication like anti-anxiety drugs or antidepressants, or a combination of both. Early intervention and support groups are also beneficial.

Prevention strategies include seeking early help, staying active, and avoiding substances like alcohol and drugs that can exacerbate anxiety symptoms. Understanding the interplay between genetics, environment, and neurochemistry is crucial to managing and addressing anxiety disorders.



### INTERVIEW

## Leading Singapore oncologists share innovations and insights in breast cancer care

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

Dr Preetha Madhukumar and Dr Sim Yirong, two of Singapore's distinguished medical professionals in the field of breast oncology, recently visited Bangladesh and had an interview with Star Health. The interview provided valuable insights into breast cancer care and highlighted the importance of addressing the challenges faced by patients in various healthcare systems.

Assistant Professor Preetha Madhukumar, a senior consultant at the National Cancer Centre Singapore, stands out with her extensive background in breast surgery and surgical oncology. With an impressive array of qualifications from institutions like the Royal College of Surgeons in Glasgow, she brings over two decades of experience and expertise to her patients.

Dr Sim Yirong is an associate consultant in surgical oncology at the same centre. Dr Yirong's education spans across continents, having earned her medical degree and PhD from the University of Cambridge, followed by a fellowship with the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh. Her focus on breast cancer research and education positions her at the forefront of advancements in the treatment and management of breast cancer.

Together, they represent the cutting-edge services in breast oncology available at Singapore General Hospital, ensuring that patients have access to comprehensive and compassionate care backed by the latest research and technological advancements in the medical field. They shared valuable insights into breast cancer care and genetic counselling.

In an answer to the question of why people should seek breast cancer care in Singapore, they stated that the high standards of healthcare in Singapore, particularly in oncology care, is the traction behind this. They



**Dr Preetha Madhukumar**  
Senior Consultant,  
National Cancer Centre Singhealth



**Dr Sim Yirong**  
Associate Consultant,  
National Cancer Centre Singhealth

emphasised that the advanced care for breast cancer makes a significant difference in patient outcomes.

Dr Madhukumar mentioned the importance of early detection and management of breast cancer, highlighting the continuity of care and multidisciplinary approach provided by their centre. She also discussed a six-month to one-year fellowship programme, which offers doctors exposure to various aspects of breast cancer care, including tumour boards, radiology, and genetic counselling.

The conversation then shifted to genetic counselling and its significance in breast cancer diagnosis and risk assessment. Dr Yirong stressed the importance of educating the general public, not just medical professionals, about the benefits of genetic testing, citing the example of Angelina Jolie. She discussed how genetic counselling can help individuals make informed decisions about their cancer risk and preventive measures.

The doctors also addressed the issue of affordability and accessibility of genetic counselling and advanced medical tests, especially in developing

countries like Bangladesh and India. They emphasised the need for cost-effective solutions, such as awareness campaigns, physical exams, and early detection measures for high-risk individuals.

The conversation touched upon breast cancer treatment options, including breast reconstruction. Dr Yirong mentioned that modern treatments allow patients to preserve their appearance through various techniques like implants, flaps, and minimally invasive surgeries. They emphasised the importance of aesthetics and body image for patients' overall well-being.

They were very candid in discussing the challenges faced by patients from developing countries. They highlighted the importance of equitable access to healthcare resources, proper training of healthcare professionals, and the need for early diagnosis.

In closing, the doctors emphasised the significance of breast cancer awareness, early detection, and timely treatment. They encouraged public education and the training of primary care physicians to improve breast cancer outcomes.



### HAVE A NICE DAY

## The power of priority - Part I

### DR RUBAUL MURSHED

For some people, family is not the most important thing; although they love their family, they consider themselves not inclined towards being a 'family person.' However, family is the first crucial unit of the social order. It plays a vital role in shaping the person one becomes. It has a significant influence on one's choices, personality, and character.

Happy homemates are more likely to achieve success in various aspects of their lives, such as spreading positivity and engaging in activities that promote good health. By carving out more time for work than with family, one destroys a natural balance between work and personal life.

This balance could allow one to recharge, rejuvenate.

It is normal to experience occasional disagreements and opposition in family life. These days, parents' uncharacteristic behaviour and actions are increasingly affecting their children badly. Family conflict can involve verbal fights or silent frustrations. Conflicts can arise within a family when members hold differing views or beliefs that contradict each other. Sometimes people jump to the wrong conclusion due to misunderstandings, leading to conflict.

Simple, unresolved conflicts often lead to serious arguments and resentment. But one of the common reasons for these people is that they do not realise 'the immense power of family.' They may either take it for granted or fail to recognise the silent, yet widely known, detrimental effects. They are bad at prioritising the importance of family first. They place a high priority on both their outside commitments and their superior or even informal schedules.

The key is not what is already in the schedule but to schedule priorities. Our lives reflect the decisions we make daily, driven by our priorities, as actions reveal priorities. Family priorities give a clear focus on what needs to be done first. They provide a sense of purpose and importance. Adopting this approach can significantly strengthen family bonds. Most importantly, family members must believe in and share common values.

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## The intersection of climate change and disease: Emerging health threats

### ABEDA SULTANA

Climate refers to the long-term pattern of weather conditions in a particular region or on the entire Earth. In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, the intertwined challenges of climate change and the spread of diseases have become a prominent concern for global health experts, policymakers, and scientists.

### Climate change and diseases

Climate change is a significant variation in average weather conditions. Observed changes over the 20th century include increases in global air and ocean temperatures, rising global sea levels due to the melting of snow and icebergs, and changes in atmospheric temperature. These changes are caused by extra heat in the climate system due to the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

This rising temperature may increase evapotranspiration, as a result of which water evaporates from the soil. There is an increase in the salinity of the soil in the coastal areas due to the rise in sea level. This scenario of gradual salinity intrusion into the coastal areas of Bangladesh is very threatening for the primary agricultural production system, coastal biodiversity, and human health.

Excessive intake of salt increases the risk of hypertension, or high blood pressure, and stroke. Pregnant women have been found to be particularly at risk of gestational hypertension, pre-eclampsia, miscarriage, and postpartum infant morbidity and mortality.

Additional greenhouse gases are primarily produced by human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas),

deforestation, more agricultural activities, and land use. Rising levels of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere will also reduce the nutritional quality of certain crops and increase the likelihood of greater micronutrient deficiency.

### Water borne diseases

Waterborne diseases are infections caused by pathogens (bacteria, viruses, or parasites) that are transmitted through contaminated water. Climate change can exacerbate the spread of these diseases. Warmer temperatures can lead to higher water temperatures in lakes, rivers, and coastal areas.

Warmer water can promote the growth of harmful microorganisms, including certain bacteria and algae, which can contaminate water sources and increase the risk of waterborne diseases. Cholera is the most common health issue that is highly connected to climatic conditions.

Cholera and typhoid both diseases are particularly connected with heavy monsoon rainfall, high summer temperature, and rising river water levels.

### Climate change and mental health risks

In recent years mental health has become a gigantic issue. Mental health deteriorated day by day. Changes in weather can cause mood swings. New evidence from Bangladesh shows that the weather influences anxiety and depression.

In the dry season, people are less anxious but more depressed than in the monsoon. Anxiety increases with a rise in temperature and humidity. Women are at higher risk than men for depression, while men are more susceptible to anxiety.

The writer is a Nutritionist and student of Master of Public Health (MPH) Programme, AIUB.



## Weight loss and brain health: impact on intracranial hypertension symptoms

### STAR HEALTH DESK

New research published in the journal Neurology has highlighted a connection between body weight and a brain condition called idiopathic intracranial hypertension (IIH). This condition involves increased pressure around the brain and spinal cord, causing symptoms like headaches and vision problems.

Studies show that losing weight can help reduce this pressure and improve the course of IIH. Scientists reviewed different ways to help people lose weight and improve IIH symptoms. They found that bariatric surgery, a type of weight loss surgery, was the most effective in reducing the pressure around the brain.

On the other hand, a programme involving various lifestyle changes was found to be the least helpful. The researchers suggest that for women with IIH and a BMI (body mass index) above 35, bariatric surgery might be considered as a way to manage their condition. However, the data used for this conclusion was limited, and there are important things to consider. For example, how much weight someone needs to lose to really help with IIH is not fully understood yet. Also, the study did not look at the safety of these weight loss methods, which is crucial for making decisions about treatment.

Additionally, there is a lack of information about certain medications that can help with weight loss, which are being used more in treating IIH. So, while the study suggests that bariatric surgery could be the most effective, there are still some important questions and safety concerns that need more investigation before making firm recommendations.














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