

Understanding sun protection and skin cancer prevention

Exposure to the sun's rays, especially during peak hours between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., can easily damage the skin. While avoiding these times is ideal, it is often not practical for many people. To protect yourself, use sunscreen, wear protective clothing, and seek shade whenever possible. Apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going outside and reapply every two to three hours, especially if swimming or sweating. For everyday use, SPF 30 sunscreen is sufficient for the face, but opt for SPF 50 or higher for extended sun exposure.

Skin cancer comes in three main types: basal cell, squamous cell, and melanoma. Basal and squamous cell cancers are less likely to spread, while melanomas can metastasize. Actinic keratosis, or pre-cancerous lesions, result from cumulative sun damage and appear as rough, red, or pink patches on the skin. While they do not directly turn into melanoma, they can develop into squamous cell carcinomas.



Factors like fair skin, red or light hair, and light-coloured eyes increase the risk of skin cancer, as does a family history of the disease. However, anyone can develop skin cancer, so it is essential for everyone to protect their skin from the sun and be aware of any changes or abnormalities.

Regular sunscreen use, protective clothing, and seeking shade are key to preventing sun damage and reducing the risk of skin cancer.

Unlocking the health potential of Ramadan: fasting benefits and nutritional strategies

DR AMIRUZZAMAN RUSSELL

Since more than 1400 years ago, Muslims have fasted by abstaining from food and drink from dawn to dusk during Ramadan as a must-do task. Fasting during this month, one of the five key pillars of Islam, is not only a religious obligation but also a time for spiritual reflection and self-discipline. However, beyond its spiritual significance, fasting for 12-14 hours during Ramadan, a form of intermittent fasting, is associated with a range of health benefits supported by scientific research.

Potential health benefits of fasting in Ramadan:

- **Better blood sugar control:** Fasting can enhance insulin sensitivity, which can positively impact blood sugar control, prevent type 2 diabetes, and potentially benefit individuals with type 2 diabetes.

- **Cardiovascular health:** Research suggests that fasting during Ramadan is associated with improvements in cardiovascular health by reducing blood pressure, bad cholesterol (LDL), markers of inflammation, and increasing good cholesterol (HDL).

- **Weight management:** Fatigue can lead to a reduction in calorie intake, which can contribute to weight management. Once your body has used up its sugar stores, it begins to burn fat to provide energy, and weight loss occurs.

- **Improved digestive health:** Fasting enhances digestive health by enabling the digestive system to rest, which allows the gut to cleanse and strengthen its lining.

- **Psychological well-being:** During the fasting process, the blood in the human body is filled with more endorphins along with other hormones, which in turn may give you a feeling of well-being and great mental health.



Food and drink choices during non-fasting hours:

Do not forget to hydrate during non-fasting hours. Drink at least 10 glasses of plain water from Iftar to Suhoor. Do not overload yourself with food while breaking the fast. After plain water, you may have soup, low-fat milk, or fresh fruit juice without added sugar, and then eat the main course 10 or 15 minutes later. This will prevent excessive food intake by giving you a sense of fullness, which in turn will help your digestive system.

Half of your Iftar plate should be filled with fruits and vegetables, as they provide nutrients with very few calories, and the remaining half should be filled with protein and whole grains. Consume a substantial quantity of proteins, including lentils, whole legumes, fish, chicken, seafood, dairy products, and eggs.

Limit heavy, creamy, and fried foods, as well as salty and sugary dishes. Rather than frying, it is recommended to use other methods of cooking, such as steaming, stir-frying in a small amount of oil, and baking. Avoid caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea, and cola because caffeine can make some people urinate more often, which may lead to dehydration.

If you are fasting, do not skip the Suhoor meal. Eating the right food at this point is key to helping to reduce cravings later in the day. Suhoor tends to include plenty of white rice or white bread in our culture, but these will only cause a glucose spike in your blood.

However, as the sugar breaks down, it typically follows this spike with a sharp decline. This fluctuation will activate the craving centre in your brain, telling you that more food is needed. Instead, opt for a fiber- and protein-rich meal.

Include vegetables, pulses, lean meats such as baked fish or chicken, and boiled or poached eggs in your diet, and that is a good way to keep from being hungry later in the day.

Carbohydrates are a fundamental component of the majority of meals. Choosing whole grains like brown rice and whole-wheat bread over refined grains like white rice and white bread is recommended.

Include healthy fats from sources such as avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil in your diet. Healthy fats are essential for various bodily functions and contribute to satiety.

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HAVE A NICE DAY Burnout

DR RUBAIUL MURSHED

In the relentless marathon of modern life, there exists a silent predator: 'burnout'. When our bodies and minds grow tired and are unable to meet the obligations required, we experience burnout. This silently creeps into our days, leaving behind a trail of exhaustion and despair. Burnout, the byproduct of prolonged stress and frustration on our mental, physical, and emotional faculties, is more than just passing fatigue—it is a formidable force that can wreak havoc on our well-being.

Physical signs of burnout might include headaches, sore muscles, and even digestive issues. This may have an impact on type 2 diabetes and heart-related conditions. It may also affect psychological health, resulting in anxiety, irritation, or mood swings. Because burnout is so excruciating, a person may become extremely exhausted and depressed, losing all energy.

Yet, what distinguishes burnout from the everyday flow of stress? Stress, a fleeting response to external pressures, is a mere visitor compared to the unwelcome lodger that is 'burnout'. This unwavering fatigue, born from unrelenting strain, can emerge from many sources—not just the pressures of work but the tangled web of responsibilities at home and the indirect influence of social expectations. Since we are social animals, their illnesses and actions have an impact on other family members.

Yet, amidst this shadow, there is a shine of hope. Research illuminates the path to recovery, showing that even those trapped in burnout's grasp can find their way back to vitality. It is a journey that may take weeks, even months, but with the right tools—support from professionals and close ones. To achieve this, we also need to underscore the importance of a meaningful life alongside relaxation and personal well-being, steering clear of glorifying personal fame.

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Rethinking long COVID

New research presented at the European Congress of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases sheds light on the phenomenon of long COVID, particularly in a highly vaccinated population like Queensland, Australia. Contrary to popular belief, the study suggests that long-term COVID may not be as distinctive as previously thought and could resemble post-viral syndromes associated with common respiratory illnesses like influenza.

A study, conducted by Queensland Health researchers, focused on individuals aged 18 and above who experienced symptoms consistent with respiratory illness between May and June 2022. They surveyed a total of 5,112 people, including those with confirmed COVID-19 (2,399 adults), those with influenza (995 adults), and those who tested negative for both viruses but exhibited symptoms (1,718 adults). A year later, in May and June 2023, participants were asked about ongoing symptoms and functional limitations. Surprisingly, the results showed that 16% of respondents reported persistent symptoms a year after their initial illness, with 3.6% experiencing moderate-to-severe functional impairment.

However, after adjusting for factors like age, sex, and First Nation status, there was no significant difference in functional limitations between COVID-19 positive individuals and those who tested negative for COVID-19 or had influenza. Moreover, the study highlighted that older adults and those experiencing symptoms such as dizziness, muscle pain, shortness of breath, post-exertional malaise, and fatigue were more likely to report functional impairment.



This suggests that a variety of factors other than the initial viral infection may affect the long-term COVID impact. Dr. John Gerrard, Queensland's Chief Health Officer, emphasised that the rates of ongoing symptoms and functional impairment associated with COVID are similar to those observed with other respiratory infections. He suggested that the term "long COVID" might inaccurately convey a sense of uniqueness or exceptionalism about the condition, potentially causing unnecessary fear and hypervigilance.

The findings also underscored the importance of comparing post-COVID-19 outcomes with those of other respiratory infections and conducting further research into post-viral syndromes. Dr. Gerrard proposed reconsidering the use of the term "long COVID," as it may inadvertently contribute to misconceptions about the condition.

In summary, the study suggests that in highly vaccinated populations like Queensland, the impact of long-term COVID may be more influenced by the sheer number of COVID-19 cases than the severity of symptoms. This challenges previous assumptions about the distinctiveness of long COVID and calls for a broader understanding of post-viral syndromes. Further research is needed to unravel the complexities of long-term COVID-19 effects and improve patient care and management.



Historic step towards the elimination of cervical cancer

Governments, donors, and global organisations pledged nearly US\$600 million in new funding to tackle cervical cancer, marking a historic step towards eliminating the deadly disease cervical cancer. At the first-ever Global Cervical Cancer Elimination Forum in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, leaders committed to expanding vaccination coverage and strengthening screening and treatment programmes with the aim of eradicating cervical cancer worldwide.

Cervical cancer, caused primarily by the human papillomavirus (HPV), claims a woman's life every two minutes, despite existing prevention and treatment tools. The adoption of the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s single-dose HPV vaccine schedule has facilitated vaccination efforts, with 37 countries already transitioning to this regimen.

The commitments announced at the forum represent a significant acceleration of efforts outlined in WHO's 2020 global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer. Major funding contributions from organisations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, and the World Bank underscore the global commitment to this cause. These investments aim to address existing challenges, including supply constraints, delivery obstacles, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare systems. Despite progress, deep inequities persist, with over 90% of cervical cancer deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries.

By prioritising political will and collaboration, leaders believe it is possible to prevent an estimated 410,000 deaths annually by 2030. The forum, which Colombia and Spain are co-hosting in collaboration with significant international health organisations, aims to inspire action and support for cervical cancer eradication. With continued dedication and investment, a future free from the threat of cervical cancer is within reach, ensuring the health and wellbeing of women worldwide.

Source: World Health Organisation





Celebrating National Children's Day

Free General Development Assessment (GDA)

United Child Development Centre offers free GDA for Special Children on March 17, commemorating the birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and National Children's Day

GDA includes

- Developmental Assessment
- Psychological Assessment
- Neurological Assessment

And

- Neurological Consultation

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Our Sister Concerns



