

High rates of intimate partner violence among adolescent girls: A global concern

A staggering number of adolescent girls around the world are experiencing intimate partner violence, with nearly a quarter of those in relationships—close to 19 million—subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by the time they reach 20 years old. This alarming statistic comes from a new analysis by the World Health Organisation (WHO), published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*. The study also found that 16% of these girls experienced such violence in just the past year.

"Intimate partner violence is starting alarmingly early for millions of young women around the world," said Dr Pascale Allotey, Director of WHO's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research Department. This early onset of violence has severe health consequences, including injuries, depression, anxiety disorders, unplanned pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections.

The study highlights that violence against adolescent girls is most prevalent in lower-income regions, such as Oceania (47%) and central sub-Saharan Africa (40%). Central Europe (10%) and central Asia (11%), in contrast, have lower rates. Factors like lower secondary school enrolment for girls, weaker legal property rights, and child marriage significantly increase the risk of violence.

To combat this issue, WHO emphasises the need for targeted support services and preventive measures tailored for adolescents. Strengthening girls' access to education, securing gender-equal property rights, and ending child marriage are critical steps towards reducing partner violence. WHO plans to release new guidelines on preventing child marriage by the end of 2024.



Essential tips for healthier, stronger hair

STAR HEALTH DESK

Achieving and maintaining healthy, strong hair often feels like a constant battle against damage and breakage. While there is no magic formula for perfect locks, adopting a thoughtful hair care routine can make a significant difference. From avoiding common pitfalls to embracing beneficial practices, here are 14 essential tips to help you nurture your hair and keep it looking its best.

1. Cool it down: Frequent use of heat styling tools like blow dryers and flat irons can weaken your hair. To prevent damage, always use a heat protectant spray, choose the coolest setting, and limit heat styling to a few times a week. Work quickly to minimise exposure.

2. Let wet hair be: Hair is most vulnerable when wet. Avoid brushing it while dripping wet to prevent breakage and damage. For straight hair, let it air-dry before gently combing with a wide-tooth comb. Curly or textured hair should be detangled with a wide-tooth comb while damp.

3. Take care with colour: Bleaching and other chemical treatments can weaken your hair. Opt for colours close to your natural shade to minimise damage, and always do a spot test with new dyes to avoid adverse reactions.

4. Meds can help or hurt: Minoxidil can help regrow hair, but you will need to use it consistently. Prescription medications like spironolactone and finasteride may also assist with hair loss. However, some medications might contribute to hair loss as a side effect. Consult your doctor for alternatives if needed.

5. Get a trim: Regular trims prevent split ends from travelling up the hair shaft and causing further damage. Aim for a trim of about 1/4 inch every 3 months to keep your ends healthy

without sacrificing growth.

6. Stress less: High stress levels can trigger hair loss and conditions like alopecia areata. Finding effective ways to manage stress, such as through relaxation techniques or counselling, can positively impact hair health.

7. Handle with care: Delicate hair, particularly in individuals with textured hair, needs extra care. Wash less frequently to avoid stripping natural oils, use gentle hair treatments, and avoid excessive chemical processing.

8. Take care with extensions and braids: Extensions and braids can offer



a temporary length boost but should not be worn for more than 2-3 months at a time. Avoid pulling them tightly to prevent scalp damage and hair breakage.

9. Get into condition(er): Conditioning helps strengthen and protect hair from damage. Apply conditioner every time you shampoo, focussing on the ends for finer hair or throughout for thicker textures.

10. Do not lose weight too fast: Rapid weight loss can lead to hair loss due to insufficient protein intake. Follow

a balanced diet to ensure your body has the nutrients needed for healthy hair growth.

11. Do not be deficient: Nutrient deficiencies can impact hair health. Ensure you are getting enough iron, vitamins B and D, zinc, omega-3 fatty acids, and biotin. Consult your doctor about supplements if necessary.

12. Sleep on satin: Switching to satin pillowcases or wearing a satin bonnet can reduce friction and prevent hair breakage, helping keep your hair smoother and healthier.

13. Give yourself a massage: Regular

scalp massages can stimulate blood circulation and potentially enhance hair growth. Use your fingers or a scalp massaging tool to gently massage your scalp for a few minutes each day.

14. Consider microneedling: Microneedling involves using a roller with tiny needles to create micro-injuries in the scalp, which can help improve hair growth when combined with treatments like minoxidil. Always consult with a dermatologist before starting microneedling to ensure it is safe and suitable for you.

Identifying and managing cholesterol problems: What you need to know

High cholesterol does not always make its presence known through obvious symptoms, but it can significantly increase your risk of serious health issues such as heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure. Here is what to look out for and how you can take charge of your cholesterol levels.

Signs of cholesterol issues: While cholesterol problems themselves do not cause noticeable symptoms, they can lead to conditions that do. Watch for:

- **Soft, yellowish growths:** Known as xanthomas, these lesions on the skin may signal high cholesterol levels.
- **Health conditions:** Obesity and diabetes often accompany high cholesterol, indicating a need for a check-up.
- **Impotence:** In men, high cholesterol can affect artery health, potentially leading to erectile dysfunction.

Steps to manage your cholesterol:

1. Understand your numbers: Cholesterol is not just one figure.

Your lipid profile includes "bad" LDL cholesterol, "good" HDL cholesterol, and triglycerides. Regular blood tests can help you track these numbers and understand your risk.

2. Get tested: Even if you feel healthy, high cholesterol can lurk unnoticed. Starting at age 20, aim to undergo testing every 4-6 years. More frequent tests are necessary if you are overweight, diabetic, or have heart disease.

3. Exercise regularly: Physical activity is a powerful way to manage cholesterol. Aim for 30 minutes of brisk exercise, like walking or swimming, several times a week. Even short bursts of activity can be beneficial.

4. Avoid smoking: Smoking lowers HDL cholesterol and raises LDL cholesterol, worsening your cholesterol profile. Quitting can improve your cholesterol and overall heart health.

5. Maintain a healthy weight: Excess weight, especially around

the abdomen, can negatively affect cholesterol levels. Even a modest weight loss can make a significant difference.

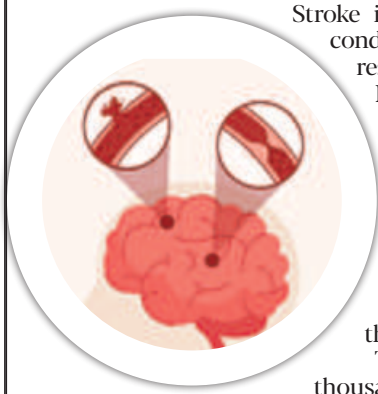
6. Limit saturated fats: Cut back on red meats, full-fat dairy, and tropical oils. Instead, opt for lean meats and low-fat dairy. Avoid trans fats found in many processed foods.

7. Address underlying conditions: Managing related health issues like diabetes and obesity can help improve cholesterol levels. Work with your doctor to treat these conditions effectively.

When to seek medical advice: Consult a doctor if you notice yellowish skin growths or if you experience symptoms like chest pain, dizziness, or slurred speech, which could be linked to high cholesterol.

Taking these steps can help you manage your cholesterol and reduce your risk of serious health problems. Stay proactive and work with your healthcare provider to keep your cholesterol in check.

Stroke survival: What the latest study reveals



Stroke is a serious health condition, and recent research from the Neurology journal sheds new light on how survival rates for two common types—

ischaemic stroke and intracerebral haemorrhage—

have changed over the past 30 years.

The study analysed

thousands of cases from

1993/1994 to 2015 and found

some hopeful news: the 5-year survival rate for ischaemic stroke, which happens when a blood clot blocks blood flow to the brain, improved from 53% to 48.3%. This suggests that advancements in treatment are making a difference. However, the outlook for intracerebral haemorrhage, a type of stroke caused by bleeding in the brain, remains less optimistic, with survival rates increasing from 64.4% to 69.2%.

This study underscores the importance of recognising stroke symptoms early and seeking prompt medical attention. If you have risk factors such as high blood pressure or diabetes, managing these conditions can significantly impact your stroke risk.

Prioritising elderly individuals for COVID-19 boosters

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, the question of how best to allocate limited booster vaccine supplies remains critical. New research from the University of Oxford, published in *PLOS Computational Biology*, suggests that prioritising elderly individuals for booster shots is the most effective way to reduce deaths, regardless of a country's socioeconomic background or age distribution.

Despite widespread vaccination efforts, the



emergence of new variants and waning immunity have led to ongoing waves of COVID-19. This has left policymakers grappling with the decision of whether to target booster vaccines at older populations or to consider other strategies that might also reduce premature deaths.

The study, led by Dr Robin Thompson, used mathematical modelling to assess the impact of different vaccination strategies across various countries with diverse economic and demographic profiles. The findings were clear: prioritising the elderly consistently resulted in the lowest number of deaths and years of life lost, a measure that considers premature mortality among younger people.

The study concludes that older individuals, who are at significantly higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19, should be prioritised for booster vaccines when supplies are limited. This strategy was shown to be effective not only in high-income countries, where the population tends to be older, but also in lower- and middle-income countries, where younger populations are more prevalent.

Global call for enhanced pandemic research

In a pivotal move for global health security, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have emphasised the need for an expanded and accelerated approach to pandemic preparedness. Announced at the Global Pandemic Preparedness Summit 2024 in Rio de Janeiro, this new strategy underscores the importance of broadening research efforts to include entire families of pathogens rather than focussing solely on individual threats.

The WHO R&D Blueprint for Epidemics' latest report advocates for a shift in how we approach pandemic research. Instead of concentrating on pathogens with immediate perceived risks, the strategy calls for the use of prototype pathogens to develop a comprehensive understanding of entire pathogen families. This broader focus aims to create versatile tools and countermeasures that can be rapidly adapted to new and emerging threats. It also emphasises the need for enhanced surveillance to better understand pathogen transmission, infection mechanisms, and immune responses.

Dr Richard Hatchett, CEO of CEPI, highlighted the importance of this expanded research approach. He compared it to illuminating a dark area by studying prototype pathogens, which could reveal

unknown pathogens that might currently be overlooked. This strategy is particularly crucial for resource-scarce regions with high biodiversity, where novel pathogens may exist but remain under-researched.

The report is the result of collaboration among over 200 scientists from more than 50 countries. It evaluated 28 virus families and one core group of bacteria, encompassing 1,652 pathogens. Researchers assessed epidemic and pandemic risks based on factors such as transmission patterns, virulence, and the availability of diagnostic tests, vaccines, and treatments.

To support this global effort, WHO is establishing Collaborative Open Research Consortia (CORCs) for each pathogen family. These CORCs will serve as research hubs, bringing together scientists, developers, funders, and regulators from around the world. The aim is to foster greater research collaboration and ensure equitable participation, particularly from regions where pathogens are likely to emerge.

This comprehensive approach seeks to strengthen global preparedness for future pandemics and enhance our ability to respond swiftly to unforeseen threats, ultimately aiming to protect global health more effectively.

Source: World Health Organisation

The hidden costs of excessive worrying!

Do you find yourself endlessly worrying about potential problems, convinced that your anxiety might somehow prevent them from happening? While this instinct to overthink can feel protective, excessive worrying can take a significant toll on both your mental and physical health. Understanding the effects of chronic worry and learning strategies to manage it can lead to a healthier, more balanced life.

What happens with excessive worrying?

Worrying, at its core, is an unease or concern about potential issues. When this worry becomes excessive, it puts both your mind and body on high alert. Chronic worriers often experience intense anxiety and panic attacks, feeling a persistent sense of impending doom. Their heightened sensitivity can make them perceive everyday situations and interactions as threats, leading to even more anxiety.

This constant state of stress can disrupt your daily life, affecting your appetite, sleep, relationships, and job performance. Many individuals turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as overeating, smoking, or substance use, to manage their anxiety. This reliance on harmful habits only exacerbates the problem, creating a vicious cycle of worry and stress.

Understanding anxiety: While a certain amount of anxiety is a normal response to stress and can even be beneficial—like motivating you to prepare for a job interview



or a test—excessive anxiety crosses into harmful territory. Anxiety disorders, such as generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder, affect nearly 40 million adults in the U.S. These disorders can make everyday stressors seem overwhelming, causing significant distress and disability.

The physical impact of excessive worry: Chronic worry activates the body's stress response, triggering the "fight or flight" reaction. This response releases stress hormones like cortisol, which can lead to various physical symptoms, including difficulty swallowing, dizziness, dry mouth, rapid heartbeat, muscle tension and aches, headaches, fatigue, shortness of breath, etc.

When the body remains in this heightened state for prolonged periods, it can lead to

more severe health issues such as immune system suppression, digestive problems, and even heart disease. If left untreated, excessive worrying can contribute to depression and suicidal thoughts.

Managing excessive worrying:

Fortunately, there are several strategies to help manage excessive worrying and reduce its impact on your health:

1. Talk to your doctor: Begin with a medical check-up to rule out other health issues. Your doctor might suggest medications to help manage anxiety.

2. Exercise regularly: Physical activity can enhance your mood and help your body handle stress more effectively. Aim for regular aerobic and strength-training exercises.

3. Maintain a balanced diet: Avoid emotional eating and focus on a nutritious diet to support overall health.

4. Limit caffeine: Excessive caffeine can heighten anxiety, so consume it in moderation.

5. Practice relaxation techniques: Techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga can help calm your mind and reduce stress.

6. Seek professional help: Therapy can provide strategies to cope with anxiety and address underlying issues.

By integrating these practices into your routine, you can break free from the cycle of excessive worrying and cultivate a more peaceful, healthier lifestyle.