



## Mastering anxiety: Strategies for immediate and long-term relief

Anxiety is a natural response to stress, but it can become overwhelming if not managed. Whether you experience occasional worry or struggle with chronic anxiety, there are effective strategies to help you cope.

### Immediate relief techniques

- 1. Question your thoughts:** Challenge the negative thoughts that fuel your anxiety. Are they realistic? Can you change your perspective?
- 2. Deep breathing:** Practice slow, focused breathing. Inhale for four counts; exhale for four. This can calm your heart rate and ease anxiety.
- 3. Aromatherapy:** Scents like lavender and chamomile can have a soothing effect. Use essential oils or candles to create a calming environment.
- 4. Exercise:** Physical activity, even a short walk, can help distract your mind and reduce stress.
- 5. Grounding techniques:** Use the 333 rule—name three things you can see, hear, and touch. This helps bring you back to the present moment.

### Long-term strategies

- 1. Identify triggers:** Recognise what sparks your anxiety. This awareness can help you manage or avoid triggers.
  - 2. Try therapy:** Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is particularly effective in managing anxiety by changing thought patterns.
  - 3. Stay active:** Regular exercise, proper sleep, and socialising with loved ones can all contribute to long-term anxiety relief.
  - 4. Mindful meditation:** Regular meditation can train your brain to handle anxiety more effectively.
  - 5. Diet and supplements:** Foods and supplements like omega-3s and green tea can support mental health over time.
- By combining immediate coping skills with long-term strategies, you can better manage anxiety and improve your overall well-being.

# RECOGNISING THE QUIET SIGNALS:

## Early detection and symptoms of breast cancer

### STAR HEALTH DESK

Waking up on a seemingly ordinary day, you might notice something different—perhaps a slight change in your breast or an unusual feeling. It is easy to dismiss these subtle signs, but they could be your body's way of signalling something important, like breast cancer. Understanding the signs and symptoms, even the most subtle ones, could save your life.

For many people, breast cancer starts quietly. There are no loud alarms, no dramatic symptoms—just a small change that could be simple to overlook. The most common early sign is a new lump in the breast or armpit that does not go away. While many lumps are harmless, some can be firm with irregular edges, more likely indicating cancer. Others might be softer, with rounded edges, or even small and difficult to detect. This is why it is so crucial not to ignore any new lump, especially since not all breast cancers present as a lump.

Your skin might also try to get your attention. Imagine your breast skin taking on a dimpled, rash-like appearance, almost resembling the peel of an orange. It might turn red, thick, or develop a strange texture. These changes are simple to dismiss but can be serious indicators that something is happening beneath the surface. Swelling in the armpit or near the collarbone could mean that breast cancer has spread to the lymph nodes, which are small organs that play a crucial role in your immune system.

Changes in your nipple are another important sign. If your nipple suddenly

starts pulling inward, feels itchy, burns, or develops sores, it is worth investigating further. Unusual nipple discharge, whether clear, bloody, or any other colour, is a red flag that should not be ignored.

Even when there does not seem to be anything wrong, breast cancer can still be present. That is why regular mammograms are vital, especially if you are over 40 or have

presents with symptoms similar to an infection. Your breast might feel warm, swollen, and red, or the skin could become dimpled, leathery, or ridged. These symptoms are often mistaken for an infection, which can delay critical treatment. That is why it is essential to know what to look for and to act quickly if you notice anything unusual.

Men, although far less likely to develop breast cancer, are not immune. About 1% of breast cancer cases occur in men, and the symptoms can be similar to those in women. A lump in the breast or armpit, or changes in the skin or nipple, such as redness, puckering, scales, or discharge, should prompt immediate medical attention.

Even after successful treatment, breast cancer can sometimes return. This recurrence might be in the same breast (local recurrence), in nearby lymph nodes (regional recurrence), or in distant parts of the body (metastatic or distant recurrence). Knowing what to watch for, like new lumps, changes in your skin, or unexplained pain, is crucial for catching a recurrence early.

So, what should you do? Listen to your body. Pay attention to those small changes that might otherwise seem insignificant. If something does not seem right, do not hesitate to consult your doctor. Being proactive about your breast health could be the most important decision you ever make. Early detection, awareness of symptoms, and regular screenings are your best defence against breast cancer. Remember, knowledge is power, and in this case, it is also a lifeline.



family history of the disease. Early detection through routine screening can make all the difference in successfully treating breast cancer.

But it is not just about finding cancer early—understanding the variety of symptoms can be life-saving. For example, inflammatory breast cancer is a rare but aggressive type that often

# Bangladesh's preparedness for Mpox: Challenges and opportunities

### GOURI BASAK PAROMA

As Mpox continues to spread globally, Bangladesh faces an urgent need to assess and enhance its preparedness for this emerging health threat. The recent classification of Mpox as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organisation has heightened the need for countries like Bangladesh to evaluate their readiness and response capabilities.

Bangladesh might face a significant challenge with the recent Mpox outbreak, particularly with the emergence of the Clade 1b strain, which is more transmissible. This new variant's spread through sexual networks adds urgency to the country's response efforts.

Dhaka's airport has taken proactive measures by setting up systems to manage passengers exhibiting Mpox symptoms. This includes providing informational leaflets, staffing health desks 24/7, and using thermal scanners for temperature



checks. Suspected cases are directed to designated hospitals for further evaluation, with safety protocols in place, such as medical masks, disposable gloves, and hand sanitisers.

The primary challenge for Bangladesh is establishing a robust surveillance system and upgrading its diagnostic capabilities. Despite improvements made during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mpox requires specific diagnostic expertise and equipment. Enhancing laboratory infrastructure and seeking external support will be crucial for effective testing

and management.

Vaccination against Mpox is another critical aspect. Currently, two global Mpox vaccines are not widely available in Bangladesh. The health ministry must collaborate with international organisations to secure vaccine supplies and develop a priority vaccination plan targeting high-risk groups and healthcare workers.

Public awareness and education are vital for an effective response. Tailored messaging on Mpox prevention, symptoms, and treatment should be communicated through various channels, including social media and existing health programmes. Collaboration with civil society organisations will help counter misinformation and support affected individuals.

Border control and travel related measures will also play a role, particularly considering Bangladesh's geographical proximity to high risk areas. Proper screening at ports of entry, combined

with targeted travel restrictions, will be necessary to manage potential outbreaks.

Bangladesh must also address resource allocation and funding challenges, balancing the response to Mpox with other health priorities. Establishing a dedicated task force and leveraging the pharmaceutical industry's capacity for local drug and vaccine production could enhance the country's preparedness. Regional cooperation within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) may further bolster response efforts.

By proactively addressing these areas, Bangladesh can build resilience against Mpox and strengthen its overall health emergency preparedness. Effective planning, vigilant monitoring, and international collaboration will be key to navigating this emerging threat and safeguarding public health.

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## WHO urges rapid access to Mpox diagnostic tests

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has called on manufacturers of mpox in vitro diagnostics (IVDs) to submit expressions of interest for Emergency Use Listing (EUL). This move follows ongoing discussions on the need for effective diagnostics, especially in low-income settings.

Testing is crucial for timely treatment and preventing the spread of mpox. Since 2022, WHO has distributed approximately 150,000 diagnostic tests globally, with over a quarter going to African countries. An additional 30,000 tests are set to be delivered to Africa in the coming weeks.

With up to 1,000 suspected cases reported this week in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the need for diagnostic tests is increasing. WHO has partnered to scale up diagnostic capacity, including equipping six new labs since May 2024. These efforts have improved testing rates significantly.

WHO has updated its guidance to detect a new mpox virus strain and is working with countries to implement it. Diagnostic tests primarily use PCR (polymerase chain reaction) to detect viral DNA, with blood testing not recommended for routine diagnosis.

The EUL procedure allows WHO to approve and procure essential medical products like tests during emergencies, aiding countries with limited access to approved diagnostics.

Source: World Health Organisation



## Surprising benefits of cognitive-behavioural therapy for insomnia in patients with chronic pain

For many struggling with insomnia, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) is often a go-to solution. But what happens when chronic pain is part of the picture? A recent study sheds light on this very question.

In a study published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, researchers dove into the effectiveness of CBT-I among older veterans suffering from both insomnia and chronic pain. The participants, averaging 72 years old, were part of a larger trial comparing CBT-I with general sleep education. Importantly, CBT-I in this study was delivered by specially trained sleep coaches under expert supervision.

Over half of the 106 veterans who received CBT-I reported chronic pain at the start



Surprisingly, those with higher pain levels experienced even more significant improvements in their insomnia symptoms after

the treatment. This is not just a short-term fix either—benefits lasted up to a year!

This finding is noteworthy because it means CBT-I can help not just with sleep but also potentially with pain management. While this study provides a hopeful glimpse into how therapy can tackle the dual challenges of sleep issues and pain, it also highlights a gap: supervised CBT-I is not always available. However, training non-clinicians to deliver this therapy might be a step towards broader access.

In summary, CBT-I proves to be a robust ally in the fight against insomnia, even when pain complicates the issue. This research offers a promising outlook for veterans and others grappling with these intertwined struggles.

## Essential insights into VITAMIN B DEFICIENCIES

Vitamin B is essential for maintaining overall health, providing energy, and supporting cell function. Deficiencies in these vitamins can lead to various health issues, depending on which vitamin you are lacking.

### Symptoms and risk factors:

Symptoms of vitamin B deficiency vary, including fatigue, skin issues, and cognitive difficulties. Certain factors increase the risk of deficiency, such as older age, pregnancy, and health conditions like diabetes, celiac disease, and thyroid disorders. Excessive alcohol consumption can also hinder vitamin B absorption, raising the risk of deficiencies.

#### • Vitamin B12:

**Key functions and sources:** Vitamin B12, or cobalamin, is crucial for the nervous system and red blood cell production. Deficiency can lead to megaloblastic anaemia, characterised by fatigue, weakness, and cognitive changes.

**Sources of vitamin B12:** Found primarily in meat, dairy products, and fortified foods, sources include beef liver, clams, poultry, eggs, cheese, and nutritional yeast.

#### • Vitamin B6:

**Immune support and energy conversion:** Vitamin B6, or pyridoxine, helps the body convert food into energy and supports the immune system. Deficiency is rare but may result in nausea, skin rashes, and anaemia. It is also vital during pregnancy for the baby's brain development.

**Sources of vitamin B6:** Rich sources include poultry, fish, starchy vegetables like potatoes, and non-citrus fruits.

#### • Vitamins B1 and B2:

**Energy production and cellular health:** Vitamin B1 (thiamine) and Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) are essential for converting food into energy and maintaining cellular function. Deficiencies are uncommon but can occur in heavy alcohol consumers, leading to symptoms like confusion and mouth sores.

**Sources of vitamin B1 and B2:** Whole grains, fortified cereals, eggs, lean meats, and green vegetables are sources of vitamins B1 and B2.

#### • Vitamin B3:

**Digestion and cellular development:** Vitamin B3, or niacin, supports digestion, appetite regulation, and cell development. Severe deficiency, though rare, can result in pellagra, characterised by rough skin, a bright red tongue, digestive issues, and mental disturbances.

**Sources of vitamin B3:** Rich in meat, poultry, fish, nuts, and fortified cereals.

#### • Vitamin B9:

**DNA synthesis and pregnancy health:** Vitamin B9, or folate, is crucial for DNA synthesis and repair. Deficiency can cause megaloblastic anaemia and, in pregnant women, increase the risk of neural tube defects in babies. Excessive folic acid intake during pregnancy may also pose risks, so balance is key.

**Sources of vitamin B9:** Natural sources include dark leafy greens, beans, asparagus, and oranges. Many grain products are fortified with folic acid.

### Preventing vitamin B deficiencies:

To prevent vitamin B deficiencies, maintain a balanced diet rich in lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. If you suspect a deficiency, consult a healthcare professional for guidance and possible supplementation. Regular check-ups can help identify and address deficiencies early, ensuring you get the necessary nutrients for optimal health.