

Impact of social media on our unhealthy eating habits

Social media has a powerful influence on our food choices, often making certain products seem more appealing and “normal” to consume. A study published in PLOS Digital Health analysed millions of posts mentioning food and beverage brands, finding that fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) dominate social media discussions. This steady exposure could encourage unhealthy eating, especially among young users, who are highly active online.

The study found that fast food mentions made up over 60% of these posts, while SSBs made up about 30%. Such frequent exposure shapes what people view as desirable or socially accepted food choices, which can influence eating behaviours and attitudes toward health. Interestingly, the research noted



that men were more likely to engage with these posts, revealing differences in how food advertising reaches and resonates with different audiences.

Given how social media is deeply embedded in daily life, researchers suggest policies to create a healthier digital food environment. For instance, limiting ads for unhealthy products or promoting more balanced dietary choices on these platforms could counteract the normalisation of fast food and sugary drinks. Since early exposure shapes lifelong habits, such changes may protect young people from developing unhealthy eating patterns influenced by their online environment.

Balancing content could support healthier choices, contributing to long-term public health improvements.

Source: PLOS Digital Health



STAR HEALTH DESK

Breast cancer is the most common cancer globally, with around 2.3 million new cases diagnosed every year. It represents one in eight cancer cases across both sexes and accounts for a quarter of all cancers in women. Alarming, around 70% of breast cancer deaths occur in resource-constrained settings. Various barriers within health systems and among patients—such as low levels of awareness and knowledge—contribute to the inadequate uptake of early detection services. As a result, many individuals receive late-stage diagnoses, leading to poor outcomes. In many low-resource settings, breast cancer also impacts a relatively younger population, significantly contributing to premature mortality and maternal orphans.

To address this critical issue, the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched the Global Breast Cancer Initiative (GBCI) in 2021. The goal is to reduce breast cancer mortality rates by 2.5% annually until 2040, which could save 2.5 million lives through three key pillars of action: health promotion for early detection,

timely diagnosis, and comprehensive management of breast cancer. Every October, during Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM), the world comes together to create awareness about this disease. This year, the emphasis was on the importance of early detection, timely diagnosis, comprehensive treatment, and the need for support for individuals with lived experiences, including patient navigation.

The objectives of BCAM include raising awareness and driving behavioural change by promoting advocacy and communication strategies to increase the uptake of breast cancer screening and early diagnosis, particularly in resource-constrained settings. Additionally, BCAM serves as a platform for sharing information and facilitating partnerships aimed at strengthening breast cancer control.

Another crucial objective is to support the national adoption of WHO's Global Breast Cancer Initiative. Countries are encouraged to implement this initiative with a focus on early detection, timely diagnosis, and comprehensive care.

Highlighting the importance of patient-centred care is also essential, as it includes medical, emotional, psychological, and social support via patient navigation systems. This approach addresses the gender and socioeconomic disparities that affect access to breast cancer care.

It is vital to acknowledge the challenges faced by individuals battling this disease. The impact of breast cancer extends beyond diagnosis and treatment; it significantly affects families and communities. Creating a supportive environment where individuals do not have to face breast cancer alone is essential for fostering resilience and hope.

Through increased awareness, advocacy, and collaboration, it can be ensured that no one faces breast cancer alone and that all individuals have access to the care and support they need. Together, we can make strides toward a future where breast cancer is detected early, treated effectively, and supported comprehensively, ultimately saving lives and reducing suffering.

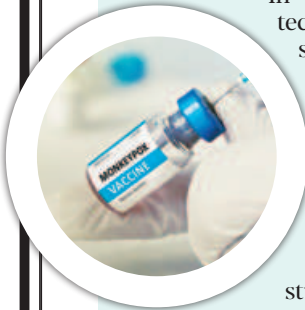
Source: World Health Organisation

MANAGING MPOX Vaccine effectiveness and treatment insights for global health

During the mpox outbreak, there was limited availability of the modified vaccinia Ankara Bavarian Nordic (MVA-BN) vaccine which led Canadian health authorities to recommend a single dose for high-risk individuals. Researchers later analysed the effectiveness of this single dose by comparing 3,204 vaccinated and 3,204 unvaccinated people, with a median age of 35 and 22% living with HIV. Results showed that mpox infection occurred less frequently among the vaccinated group, with 21 cases versus 50 in the unvaccinated group, indicating 58% effectiveness for a single dose.

In the United States, tecovirimat—a medication stockpiled for smallpox treatment—was also made available for mpox under a special access protocol due to its effectiveness against similar viruses in animal models. An observational study followed 1,043 mpox patients, where the majority were male, 52% were co-infected with HIV, and 4% were severely immunocompromised. The data revealed that 15% of patients had been vaccinated with MVA-BN. Hospitalisation rates were 4% across all patients but rose to 43% among severely immunocompromised individuals. For most people, lesions healed within 14 days of treatment, though 20 individuals died, 18 of whom were severely immunocompromised.

These findings highlight the effectiveness of even a single vaccine dose in reducing mpox risk, particularly for high-risk populations, and the critical role of targeted antiviral treatments like tecovirimat for severe cases.



The empowering benefits of being a weekend warriors

STAR HEALTH DESK

In the hustle and bustle of modern life, many individuals struggle to find the time for regular exercise, often juggling work commitments, family responsibilities, and social obligations. However, a growing movement known as the “weekend warrior” phenomenon is gaining attention. Weekend warriors are those who concentrate their physical activity into just one or two days each week, making the most of their limited time to reap significant health benefits.

At first glance, cramming exercise into a couple of days may seem counterintuitive. How could intense bursts of physical activity be as beneficial as more frequent workouts? Surprisingly, research suggests that weekend warriors can enjoy the same advantages as those who exercise regularly throughout the week. Engaging in physical activity over the weekend can lead to improved cardiovascular health, enhanced mental well-being, and even lower risks of chronic diseases.

The beauty of being a weekend warrior lies in its flexibility. For those who may feel overwhelmed by the idea of daily workouts, this approach allows them to set aside dedicated time for fitness without the pressure of squeezing in multiple sessions during the week. It is an empowering way to embrace a healthier lifestyle on one's own terms.

Weekend warriors often discover that these concentrated workout sessions can be invigorating and uplifting. Whether it is hitting the trails for a long run, joining a weekend yoga class, or participating in a team sport, the joy of movement can be a powerful motivator. The thrill of achieving a personal best in a race or the satisfaction of completing a challenging hike can leave participants feeling accomplished and rejuvenated.

Moreover, exercising on the weekends fosters a sense of community and social connection. Group workouts, local sports leagues,

or even casual meetups with friends at the gym can enhance the overall experience. These social interactions not only make exercise more enjoyable but can also provide the necessary encouragement to maintain this weekend commitment.

The benefits extend beyond physical health. Regular physical activity has been shown to boost mood, reduce stress, and combat anxiety and depression. For weekend warriors, dedicating time to exercise can serve as a much-needed escape from the pressures of daily life. The endorphins released during exercise create a natural high, leaving individuals feeling more balanced and focused.

While some may worry about the risks associated with intense exercise sessions after a week of inactivity, the key is to listen to one's body. Weekend warriors can avoid injuries by gradually increasing their activity levels and prioritising warm-ups and cool-downs. It is essential to find a balance that respects personal fitness levels and limitations.

For those hesitant to embrace the weekend warrior lifestyle, it is important to recognise that every bit of movement counts. Whether it is a brisk walk, a bike ride, or a dance party in the living room, engaging in physical activity—even in shorter bursts—can contribute to overall health. The emphasis should be on finding joy in movement and making it a regular part of life, even if that means dedicating just one or two days a week to exercise.

In conclusion, the weekend warrior phenomenon offers a practical and empowering approach to fitness. By focusing on quality over quantity, individuals can achieve remarkable health benefits without the constraints of a rigid weekly schedule. So if your weekdays are packed, do not fret. Embrace the weekend warrior spirit and discover how fulfilling it can be to prioritise your health on your own terms. After all, it is not just about the frequency of exercise; it is about making the time you do have count.



FUTURE IN FOCUS Committing to accessible family planning for youth

STAR HEALTH REPORT

The 9th National Youth Conference on Family Planning 2024 in Dhaka brought together over 500 young advocates, health experts, and policymakers dedicated to advancing reproductive health rights for Bangladeshi youth. Organised by SERAC Bangladesh, the two-day event began on October 29 and centered on the theme, “Empowering Youth: Ensuring Access to Family Planning through Expanded Reproductive Health and Education, Improved Nutrition and Health, Life Skills, Climate Justice, and Gender Equality,” highlighting a comprehensive approach to adolescent health.

In his opening remarks, Md Saifullahil Azam, Director General of the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP), urged the youth to work actively toward achieving FP2030's commitments, emphasising their crucial role in meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNFPA's Dr Iliza Azyei added that reaching the “three zeros” of zero unmet family planning needs, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence was pivotal, with young people positioned as essential players in this mission.

International voices reinforced this message of partnership and collaboration. Patricia Mengech, Director of the Population, Health, and Nutrition Office at USAID Bangladesh, stressed that lasting success in adolescent health requires collective effort. Edward Cabrera from the Canadian High

Commission highlighted Canada's commitment to inclusive family planning services, describing access as “essential for a healthier, equitable future.”

Youth speakers were a highlight, presenting innovative, community-driven solutions. Md Nazmul Hasan shared insights into the Volunteer Peer Leader (VPL) model under USAID's Shukhi Jibon project, showcasing how youth-led approaches empower adolescents to advocate for their family planning rights.

A vibrant exhibit zone



transformed health education into an engaging experience. Partners like Ipas, Share-Net Bangladesh, SERAC, Pure Earth, Jhpiego, and Marie Stopes Bangladesh facilitated interactive activities, including a reproductive health-themed Ludo game and a puppet show, which captivated attendees and deepened their understanding of health issues.

Throughout the conference, various sessions covered pressing topics. Pathfinder International led a session on climate resilience and the role of youth in SRHR during

natural disasters, while Marie Stopes Bangladesh advocated inclusivity by focusing on family planning access for adolescents with disabilities.

In a life skills education session, FP2030 and Dr Muhammad Munir Hossain from UNFPA Bangladesh highlighted the importance of equipping youth with the tools to make informed health choices.

Representing the Bangladesh Medical Students Society, Iftikhar Ahmed Sakib, and BYHAN's Songita Sarker advocated for policy changes to remove barriers

to reproductive health for youth, energising attendees to pursue broader youth-focused health solutions. At the conference, USAID's Adolescent Health Activity panel, moderated by Dr Nayan Chakravarty of Mott MacDonald, focused on empowering youth in health decision-making. A new addition this year was a session on adolescent nutrition led by NutriTeens and International Adolescent Health Week (IAHW2024). Experts like Dr Md Saiful Islam, Asfia Azim, and

Dr Md Shamsul Haque discussed how proper nutrition supports both mental and physical health, forming a foundation for a stronger generation.

UNICEF and the Global Financing Facility addressed mental health and financing youth health programmes. The conference concluded with a scientific poster presentation showcasing youth-led SRHR innovations.

Dr Abu Jamil Faisal received the Lifetime Achievement Award, while Tasnia Ahmed was recognised for Youth Excellence, Md Masum Billah as Adolescent Champion, and UNFPA Bangladesh for Exemplary Partnership.

This landmark conference was powered by partners such as USAID's Adolescent Health Activity, Global Affairs Canada, Bangladesh Youth Health Action Network, Coalition of Youth Organisations in Bangladesh, FP2030, Global Financing Facility, HealthBridge Foundation, Ipas Bangladesh, Jhpiego, Mott MacDonald, Marie Stopes Bangladesh, Pathfinder International, Share-Net Bangladesh, Youth Coalition for Climate Justice, and UNFPA Bangladesh.

As the event concluded, attendees left with a renewed dedication to championing accessible family planning for Bangladeshi youth, with the momentum from these discussions and collaborations set to drive policy changes, strengthen partnerships, and inspire young advocates to shape an empowered and equitable future.

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Addressing this issue requires more than just financial support; it means finding ways to make food accessible and safe for all. By understanding and supporting the diverse needs of older adults, we can help prevent unnecessary health crises and ensure that managing diabetes does not feel like an uphill battle.

Source: Journal of General Internal Medicine

The hidden challenge for seniors with diabetes: Food insecurity and blood sugar risks

For seniors managing diabetes, the daily task of keeping blood sugar levels stable can be challenging. Now imagine adding another hurdle: not having reliable access to food. Food insecurity, in all its forms, complicates diabetes care in ways that often go unnoticed.

When we think about food insecurity, we usually think of financial difficulties—the inability to afford enough nutritious food. But there is another aspect that affects many older adults:

the physical challenges of shopping or preparing meals. Both types of food insecurity can be risky for people with diabetes, especially when missed meals or delayed eating lead to dangerously low blood sugar levels, also known as hypoglycemia. Without the certainty of



regular meals, some seniors face serious health risks. Blood sugar can dip suddenly, resulting in dizziness, confusion, or even passing out, which requires immediate help. In fact, many older adults end up in emergency situations simply because they did not have food at the right

time.