

Smoke-free alternatives could save 4.6 million lives in Indonesia

More than 4.6 million lives could be saved if Indonesia embraces smoke free alternatives to traditional cigarettes, according to a sensational new report.

Indonesia has one of the highest smoking rates globally and records 300,000 deaths every year from tobacco-related diseases.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts this woeful toll will increase even further next year when the smoking rate is forecast to rise to 37.5% of adults.

However, a groundbreaking report shows that this trend could be dramatically reversed if the country integrated tobacco harm reduction (THR) strategies into its public health policy.

Dr Delon Human, a co-author of the report Saving 4.6 million lives in Indonesia, said: "With over 65% of adult men in Indonesia smoking, and the country's high smoking-related death toll, it is clear that a new approach is urgently needed."

Switching to safer nicotine products is significantly more effective than traditional cessation tools, such as nicotine replacement therapy. Our analysis shows that if Indonesia embraced THR strategies, including smoke-free alternatives to cigarettes, it has the opportunity to save 4,616,000 lives by 2060 while leading the way in tobacco control reform."

The report calls for health professionals, especially physicians, to promote THR and counter nicotine misinformation to reduce smoking-related harm.

It also urges the Indonesian government to adopt risk proportionate regulations for safer alternatives, invest in local research to guide evidence-based policies, and strengthen consumer advocacy through independent, science-based groups.

Additionally, engaging religious leaders could help guide communities to quit smoking and support harm reduction efforts, reaching a broader audience across Indonesia.

Dr Human, leader of Smoke Free Sweden, said: "Public health can be radically improved if governments and health professionals work together to communicate the benefits of smoke-free alternatives.



Eating good food vs. eating nutritious food: What is the difference?

RAISA MEHZABEEN

What comes to mind when we think of 'good food'? For many, it is about flavour, indulgence, and satisfaction. 'Good food' is commonly associated with taste, presentation, and enjoyment—a feast for our senses. Whether it is a rich slice of cheesecake, a gourmet burger, or a well-spiced bowl of pasta. However, what is often labelled as 'good food' may lack the nutrients we need for overall health.

Many of our favourite indulgences are high in sugars, unhealthy fats, or artificial additives, which contribute to weight gain, inflammation, and other health issues when consumed in excess. So, while good food has its place in life's enjoyment, it does not necessarily mean it is good for us nutritionally.

Nutritious food, on the other hand, prioritises health, longevity, and body function. It is defined by its nutrient density—the vitamins, minerals, fibre, and essential fats that our body needs to thrive.

When we think of nutritious food, we think of colourful vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and fruits. These foods not only support our body but also help reduce the risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and even some forms of cancer.

The benefits of nutritious foods go beyond just physical health. They also impact mental well-being. Studies consistently show that nutrient-rich diets improve mood, support cognitive function, and reduce the risk of mental health issues. This is not to say nutritious food is not enjoyable. A well-seasoned salad or a well-cooked lean protein can be incredibly delicious, proving that nutritious food can also be good food. The secret lies in preparation and mindful eating.

The balance between enjoyment and health: The real challenge lies in finding a balance. Rather than seeing 'good food' and 'nutritious food' as mutually exclusive, we can seek to merge the two. There is a middle ground where food can be both nourishing and delightful. For instance, a homemade smoothie with fruits, greens, and a dollop of yoghurt can be delicious and nutritious. Grilled salmon with a side of roasted vegetables or a bowl of spiced lentil soup can be both satisfying and packed with nutrients.

It is essential to remember that food does not have to be bland to be nutritious. Seasonings like herbs and spices, different cooking techniques, and even occasional indulgences can make nutritious foods taste amazing without compromising health.

Shifting the focus to a long-term vision: In a world where fast food and processed items are marketed as 'good food'—cheap, quick, and tasty—the importance of nutritious food is often overshadowed. But while good food may give us a moment of pleasure, nutritious food gives us a lifetime of wellness. Choosing nutritious foods most of the time provides long-term health benefits, while indulging in 'good food' occasionally satisfies our cravings and emotional connections to food.

Ultimately, the difference between good food and nutritious food is not about choice; it is about priority. Prioritising nutritious food as a daily staple and reserving good food as a treat can be a powerful approach. This does not mean deprivation; it means making conscious choices that support our health and happiness.

In the end, we do not have to choose between eating good food and eating nutritious food. We can aim to incorporate both into our lives in a way that supports our body and nourishes our soul. Finding the harmony between flavour and function is the key to a well-rounded, joyful, and healthy life.

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Call to reassess e-cigarette import ban with four key demands

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Stakeholders and industry representatives submitted a memorandum to Chief Advisor Dr Muhammad Yunus, urging him to reconsider the government's decision to ban the import of e-cigarettes, says a press release. In the memorandum, they expressed a deep concern over the decision, which includes adding e-cigarettes and Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) to the list of prohibited items in the Import Policy Order by the Ministry of Commerce. Stakeholders fear this decision will deprive adult smokers of a less harmful alternative to quit smoking, potentially causing significant negative impacts on public health and the economy.

The memorandum was submitted on December 28, 2024, at the official residence of the Chief Advisor, Jamuna, by organisations including Voice of Vapers, Consumer Rights of Sales Alternatives (CORS), and Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery System Traders Association (BENDSTA). Earlier in the day, the organisations held a human chain at Shahbagh, Dhaka, under the theme, "Reconsider the Import Ban on Harm Reduction Products to Prevent Smoking." The event was attended by representatives from these organisations, including Schumann Zaman, Anisuzzaman Khan, Rezwan Ahmed, Iftekharul Alam, Reaz Mahbub, and NurulAfshar, among others.

At the human chain, Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery System Traders Association (BENDSTA) President Schumann Zaman said, "Vaping or e-cigarettes are harm-reduction products, developed to minimise the risks associated with smoking. UK Health Security Agency research has shown that these are 95% less harmful than conventional cigarettes. Countries

like the UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Sweden are promoting their use as part of their public health policies. A ban like this could push current e-cigarette users back to traditional smoking, creating an even greater public health risk."

He also added, "Global experiences show that banning e-cigarettes does not stop their use. Instead, it leads to the emergence of black markets. After India banned e-cigarettes in 2019, illegal sales surged significantly, compromising product quality and user safety while also causing the government to lose substantial revenue."

Consumer Rights of Sales Alternatives (CORS) Director

and logical regulatory framework. This approach would ensure the dual goals of public health improvement and providing safer alternatives for adult smokers.

They urged the government to work with stakeholders to develop a fair regulatory structure and called for the application of proven tobacco harm reduction strategies to safeguard public health.

The proposals of the Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems Traders Association (BENDSTA) are as follows:

1. Reconsider the ban on importing ENDS products and formulate regulatory policies for these products based on scientific research.

2. Develop an inclusive



policy framework by engaging stakeholders such as traders, importers, users, and health experts.

3. Establish specific regulations for product importation, quality control, and licensing to prevent the entry of substandard and illegal products into the market.

4. Enforce strict age restrictions to prevent access by minors, along with stringent laws to address violations of these age limits.

The organisations demanded that, instead of imposing a complete ban on e-cigarettes, the government implement a scientific

A new gene therapy could change the lives for people with haemophilia A

Imagine living with a condition where even a minor injury could lead to life-threatening bleeding. This is the reality for people with severe haemophilia A. But a groundbreaking study from India may offer a life-changing solution.

Researchers tested a new gene therapy on five men, aged 22 to 41, who had frequent bleeding episodes—more than 20 a year. This therapy used their own blood stem cells, modified to carry a special



gene that helps produce the clotting protein factor VIII, which people with haemophilia A lack. Unlike traditional treatments, they underwent a gentler pre-treatment with a drug called treosulfan, and some received a special "boost" called a transduction enhancer.

The outcomes were truly remarkable. Bleeding episodes stopped completely for all participants, and they showed stable levels of factor VIII. Those who got the "boost" had much higher levels of the clotting protein, reaching up to 40 times that of those who did not.

Even better, this treatment didn't seem to disrupt their overall health—most participants maintained normal sperm counts, an encouraging sign of safety.

For people with haemophilia A, this could mean freedom from constant bleeding and endless treatments. While the therapy is still in its early stages, it offers hope that life with haemophilia might soon look very different. Scientists are optimistic this innovation could lead to a brighter future for millions worldwide.



Managing diabetes during winter in Bangladesh

DR SHAHJADA SELIM

Winter in Bangladesh presents unique challenges for those living with diabetes. Naturally, during colds, patients with diabetes utilise more calories and remain in good glycaemia. But in Bangladesh, the picture is reversed; here, people consume huge carbohydrate-rich foods in winter time. There are several family festivals, seasonal festivals, and celebrations. All will end up with high blood sugar. On the other hand, many of our patients with diabetes refrain from physical exercise due to cold weather, again risking them to uncontrolled diabetes.

Adequate care and focus during this season are crucial for sustaining good health, avoiding complications, and considering some key points for reflection.

1. Monitor blood sugar regularly: Check your blood sugar levels frequently, as cold weather can affect glucose control.

Keep your glucometer in a warm, dry place to ensure accurate readings.

2. Stay warm and active: Engage in indoor exercises like yoga, light aerobics, or stretching if outdoor activities are less feasible.

Wear layered clothing to stay warm and avoid cold-related stress, which can impact blood sugar levels.

3. Make wise food choices: Incorporate seasonal vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage, spinach, radish, and carrots into your diet for balanced nutrition.

Limit sugary treats commonly enjoyed during winter festivals, and choose lower glycaemic alternatives.

4. Take extra care of your

feet: Reduced circulation in cold weather can increase the risk of foot complications.

Keep your feet warm and dry, and inspect them daily for cuts, sores, or signs of infection.

5. Store insulin and medications properly: Protect insulin from freezing by storing it in a temperature-controlled environment to maintain its effectiveness, though this is not a big issue in Bangladesh.

6. Prevent seasonal illness: Colds and flu can raise blood sugar levels. Stay vaccinated, practice good hygiene, and drink plenty of fluids to boost your immunity.

Elderly patients with diabetes are at high risk for pneumonia, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases during this period.

7. Stay hydrated: Drink adequate water and warm, unsweetened beverages to avoid dehydration, which can impact blood sugar control.

8. Consult your endocrinologist: Winter may require adjustments to your diet, medication, or exercise routine. Regular check-ins with your doctor can help tailor a plan that works best for you.

By following these tips and making necessary lifestyle adjustments, you can effectively manage diabetes and enjoy a healthy winter season in Bangladesh.

Control your blood sugar and reduce the risk of chronic complications of diabetes.

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DIABETES MEDICATIONS Reducing asthma exacerbations

Emerging research suggests that certain diabetes medications could offer benefits beyond blood sugar control, potentially helping to reduce asthma symptoms and flare-ups. Diabetes and obesity are known to contribute to worsened asthma control, and managing both conditions effectively could lead to better overall health outcomes.

Recent studies have explored the effects of medications commonly used to treat type 2 diabetes on asthma. Notably, drugs like metformin and glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists have shown promise in reducing asthma exacerbations. These medications appear to work independently of the patient's asthma severity or metabolic factors, suggesting that their benefits may extend beyond just controlling blood sugar.



While metformin has long been a first-line treatment for type 2 diabetes, GLP-1 receptor agonists are newer medications that help regulate both blood sugar and appetite. The combination of these drugs may provide an added advantage for patients dealing with both asthma and diabetes, improving quality of life by reducing asthma flare-ups.

However, it is important to note that other diabetes medications did not show similar benefits in asthma control. As such, these findings highlight the potential for targeted therapies that address both conditions simultaneously, although further studies are needed to confirm these results and understand the mechanisms at play.

Overall, the growing evidence supports a more integrated approach to treating patients with both asthma and diabetes, potentially improving outcomes for individuals managing these chronic conditions.