

Small steps, big changes: Your guide to achieving weight loss goals

Losing weight and improving your health often require lifestyle changes, and setting clear, realistic goals can make a big difference in your success. Effective weight loss goals include a long-term objective—like shedding 10 pounds in six months—supported by smaller, actionable steps, such as daily 20 minute walks after dinner.

Create SMART goals: Successful weight management often starts with SMART goals:

- Specific: Define exactly what you will do.
- Measurable: Track your progress easily.
- Action-based: Focus on actions you control.
- Realistic: Ensure your goals are achievable.
- Timely: Set deadlines to keep yourself motivated.

For instance, instead of vague goals like "exercise more," commit to walking 8,000 steps daily. Replace "eat healthier" with specifics, such as including a salad in your lunch each weekday.

Keep goals realistic: Ambitious targets, like losing 10 pounds in two weeks, may set you up for frustration. Instead, focus on sustainable habits, such as exercising 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Gradual progress, like losing 5% of your body weight over several months, can significantly improve your health and reduce the risk of conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

Celebrate progress: Reward yourself for achieving milestones to stay motivated. Small rewards like a relaxing bath or a new book can keep you on track, while bigger rewards—like a weekend trip—can celebrate major successes.

By breaking down your goals into manageable steps and celebrating your progress, you can build lasting habits that lead to long-term weight loss and better health.



Seasonal trends in respiratory infections: A global perspective

STAR HEALTH DESK

As winter takes hold in many parts of the world, there is a predictable rise in acute respiratory infections (ARIs). These increases are typically driven by seasonal epidemics of common pathogens such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), human metapneumovirus (hMPV), and mycoplasma pneumoniae. The co-circulation of these respiratory pathogens during the colder months can pose challenges for healthcare systems, as they work to manage the additional burden of seasonal illnesses.

Global surveillance systems have recorded a rise in influenza-like illness (ILI) and ARI rates in recent weeks. This trend aligns with typical seasonal patterns. Influenza activity has elevated, with variations in the dominant influenza subtype depending on the region. RSV activity shows variability, with some areas observing declines while others report increases. Although routine hMPV surveillance is not conducted in all countries, available data suggest a seasonal rise in cases, reflecting global patterns seen during this time of year.

Attention has also turned to the global implications of respiratory virus transmission. Reports highlight a seasonal increase in infections caused by influenza, RSV, hMPV, and other common respiratory pathogens. Influenza remains the most frequently detected cause

of ARIs, particularly affecting vulnerable populations, with other pathogens like mycoplasma pneumoniae impacting specific age groups. SARS-CoV-2 activity, while generally low, is being monitored closely for any indications of surges.

The seasonal rise in ARIs and respiratory pathogen detections is consistent with expectations for this time of year. There have been no reports of unusual outbreaks, and healthcare systems across the globe have managed to maintain operations without significant strain. Public health authorities in various countries have responded by intensifying preventive measures and providing health messaging to minimise the impact of these illnesses.

Preventing and reducing the spread of respiratory infections relies heavily on public health strategies. The World Health Organisation (WHO) advises individuals to stay home if they have mild symptoms to avoid spreading the infection to others. For those in high-risk groups or experiencing severe or complicated symptoms, seeking timely medical care is critical. Additional preventive measures include wearing masks in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces, practicing regular handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or bent elbow, and getting recommended vaccinations.

WHO continues to work with global surveillance networks to track respiratory illnesses and their impact.

Integrated surveillance of respiratory pathogens allows countries to allocate resources effectively and implement targeted responses. Guidance from WHO helps assess the severity of influenza and other respiratory epidemics, ensuring healthcare systems can respond promptly to any sudden changes in disease patterns.

Vaccination remains a cornerstone of prevention, particularly for high-risk populations, including the elderly, young children, and individuals with preexisting conditions. Seasonal influenza vaccines and other recommended immunisations can significantly reduce the risk of severe illness and associated complications.

While the global community faces the usual seasonal increase in respiratory infections, these trends remain within expected ranges. Collaborative surveillance and proactive public health measures play vital roles in mitigating the burden of these diseases and protecting vulnerable populations. WHO continues to provide updates and support as needed, emphasising the importance of maintaining vigilance against seasonal respiratory pathogens.

By taking simple but effective preventive measures and adhering to public health advice, communities worldwide can navigate the season with resilience and minimise the impact of respiratory illnesses.

Source: World Health Organisation

Winter migraine: A curse

RAISA MEHZABEEN

Winter, otherwise known for its crisp air and merriment, is quite a difficult time for migraine-prone people. These debilitating headaches are not just a neurological disorder but also a condition influenced by lifestyle, environmental factors, and diet. As the mercury goes down, so does the resilience of many who find their migraines worsening during this season.

Triggers of winter migraines: Cold weather and sudden temperature changes are known to trigger such headaches. The dry air in winter, combined with minimal sun exposure, leads to easy dehydration and vitamin D deficiency, both of which are potent triggers for migraine attacks. Also, overindulgence in seasonal feasting with rich, processed foods containing preservatives, artificial sweeteners, or tyramine—a chemical occurring in aged cheese and cured meats—aggravates symptoms.

The season becomes even more intolerable for people who develop various sensitivities to commonly consumed food items during this season, which include citrus fruits and hot drinks containing caffeine. The excess consumption of caffeine to essentially warm the body during winter months temporarily eases the symptoms but leads eventually to rebound headaches.

Nutritional defence against migraine: Dietary changes can be a first line of defence against winter migraines. A diet rich in magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids, and hydration is important. Magnesium, one of the most documented nutrients for reducing migraine frequency, is found in leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. Omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish like salmon, walnuts, and flaxseeds help combat inflammation, one of the known triggers for migraines.

Adequate hydration is important and cannot be overemphasised. Winter air is deceptively dehydrating, and dehydration can exacerbate migraine symptoms. Warm herbal teas, such as ginger or chamomile, hydrate and offer anti-inflammatory and soothing properties.

Vitamin D's role: Poor winter sunlight exposure can easily lead to a lack of vitamin D. Vitamin D has a close relationship with migraine attacks; a low level raises the frequency. Improvement in its level is highly necessary, and supplementation or dietary changes may be helpful. It is always better to consult a doctor before starting this supplement.

Lifestyle matters: Apart from nutrition, maintaining a consistent eating schedule is vital. Skipping meals or fasting can trigger migraines due to blood sugar fluctuations. Regular, small meals with a low glycaemic index can keep blood sugar levels stable. Additionally, managing stress, engaging in light exercise, and getting sufficient sleep are essential for overall well-being and migraine management.

Winter migraines can be a curse, but with the right approach, they are eminently controllable. A considerate and well-balanced diet that keeps away from the most common triggers and covers the minimum nutritional intake goes a long way in avoiding debilitating episodes. Nutritional wisdom coupled with lifestyle changes will help change this winter curse into a controllable malady that does not take away the joys of winter.

Let us not let migraines dampen the winter spirit. It is now time to adopt a nourishing, migraine-friendly lifestyle for a healthier and happier winter.

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Caring for your liver: Key steps to stay healthy

Your liver is a vital organ that supports digestion, cleans toxins from your blood, produces bile to break down fats, and stores glucose for energy. Protecting it is essential for long-term health.

Healthy habits for liver health:

- **Safe alcohol:** Excessive drinking damages liver cells, leading to conditions like cirrhosis. Stick to one drink per day for women and two for men.

- **Balanced diet and exercise:** A healthy lifestyle helps prevent metabolic dysfunction-associated steatoic liver disease (MASLD), formerly known as nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.

Medication and toxin awareness:

- **Safe medicine use:** Overuse of acetaminophen (Tylenol) or combining alcohol with certain drugs can harm your liver. Always check with your doctor about safe medication use.

- **Avoid toxins:** Limit exposure to harmful chemicals in cleaning products, insecticides, and cigarette smoke.

Preventing viral hepatitis:

- **Hepatitis A:** Spread through contaminated food or water, it is preventable with a vaccine.

- **Hepatitis B and C:** Transmitted through blood and bodily fluids. Practice safe hygiene, use protection during sex, and avoid sharing personal items.

Herbal remedies and coffee:

Be cautious with supplements like green tea extract or ginseng, which may harm the liver. Interestingly, research suggests coffee may lower liver disease risk.

A healthy lifestyle and proactive care ensure your liver continues its vital work, helping you live a healthier life.



ONE HEALTH, ONE FIGHT

Addressing the Nipah virus threat in Bangladesh

DR MAHBUBA MUSLIMA MIM

One Health is an integrated approach that recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. This concept became widely acknowledged in the early 1900s, and in recent years, outbreaks such as Ebola, SARS, and COVID-19 have further highlighted its significance.

One Health aims to tackle complex health challenges, such as zoonotic diseases (those that spread from animals to humans), antibiotic resistance, and environmental degradation. The approach fosters collaboration across various sectors, encouraging coordinated efforts to address health threats at the interface of humans, animals, and ecosystems.

In Bangladesh, where humans, animals, and the environment are in constant contact, One Health is vital to managing health risks. The country is highly vulnerable to zoonotic diseases like avian flu, leptospirosis, and notably, Nipah virus.

Nipah virus (NiV), which emerged as a zoonotic threat over the past 25 years, is one of the most dangerous pathogens, with a high fatality rate. Bangladesh has experienced the highest number of NiV cases, reporting 341 cases and 241 deaths, leading to a

fatality rate of 71%. This deadly virus is primarily transmitted by fruit bats, which can infect animals such as pigs. Humans become infected through direct contact with infected animals or contaminated food sources.

One of the major routes of transmission of NiV in Bangladesh is through the consumption of raw date palm sap contaminated by bat saliva or urine. This sap, commonly consumed in the region, can cause severe symptoms, including fever, headache,



dizziness, nausea, and vomiting. In severe cases, the infection can lead to encephalitis (brain inflammation), respiratory distress, seizures, and coma. The virus can rapidly progress to brain swelling and respiratory failure, often resulting in death. While some survivors recover, they may experience long-term neurological complications.

The importance of the One Health

approach in addressing Nipah virus cannot be overstated. Efforts to prevent outbreaks must focus on monitoring bat populations, improving surveillance systems, and raising public awareness. Educating the public about the risks of consuming raw date palm sap and encouraging boiling the sap before consumption can significantly reduce the risk of infection.

There is currently no specific antiviral treatment for Nipah virus, and management primarily involves supportive care. Governments, both nationally and globally, must continue to collaborate to improve surveillance, share data, and enhance early warning systems.

The Nipah virus outbreaks in Bangladesh highlight the critical importance of the One Health approach. Addressing the complex interaction between human, animal, and environmental health is essential for preventing future outbreaks and protecting public health. By working together across sectors and borders, countries can reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases and strengthen global health security.

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Winter immunity boost: Eat right, stay strong

As winter sets in, strengthening your immune system is essential, especially in Bangladesh, where cold weather can make people more vulnerable to respiratory infections like the flu and common colds. A well-balanced diet plays a key role in supporting the immune system during this season.

Nutritionist Serena Poon emphasises the importance of antioxidant-rich foods, such as vegetables, fruits, and nuts, to protect against oxidative stress, which can weaken immune function. In Bangladesh, locally available root vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, and radishes are excellent sources of vitamins A, C, and K. These vegetables are not only nutritious but are also commonly grown in winter.

Leafy greens, including spinach and mustard leaves, are rich in essential nutrients and antioxidants. They are



widely available in local markets and can easily be incorporated into daily meals. Citrus fruits like oranges and lemons, available during winter, are packed with vitamin C, a key nutrient for boosting immunity.

Berries, although not as common in local diets, can be substituted with fruits like guavas and papayas, which are rich in vitamins and antioxidants. Nuts, such as almonds and walnuts, are a great addition to winter diets and



can be found in many local markets.

In Bangladesh, fermented foods like yoghurt, which are commonly consumed, support gut health and contribute to better immune function. Local dishes made with garlic, ginger, and turmeric are also valuable, as these spices have anti-inflammatory and immune-boosting properties.

To support overall health, staying hydrated, ensuring adequate sleep, and incorporating regular physical activity into daily routines are essential. For those recovering from illness, traditional remedies such as chicken soup, herbal teas, and vitamin D-rich foods like fish are widely used and helpful.

By focusing on a nutritious winter diet, Bangladeshis can better protect themselves from seasonal illnesses and maintain a strong immune system throughout the colder months.

KNEE OSTEOARTHRITIS Managing pain and moving freely

DR M EASIN ALI

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a degenerative disease where bone erosion occurs, leading to rough joint surfaces and reduced joint space due to osteophyte formation. Commonly affected areas include the cervical and lumbar vertebrae, hip, and knee joints. As the most weight-bearing joint in the body, the knee is frequently affected, especially in individuals aged 45-50 and older.

Symptoms of OA in the knee joint:

- Pain and swelling in the knee
- Difficulty bending the knee, affecting sitting, toileting, and stair use
- Reduced ability to stand or walk for prolonged periods

Treatment and management:

While OA cannot be cured, pain-free movement can be maintained through physiotherapy and supplements like glucosamine, chondroitin, hyaluronic acid, calcium, and vitamin D.

Physiotherapy treatments:

- Manual therapy, Mulligan technique, ultrasound therapy
- Short-wave diathermy, laser therapy, and therapeutic exercises

Daily life advice for OA patients:

1. Avoid frequent stair use and prolonged standing.
2. Maintain a healthy weight
3. Use knee caps or walking aids
4. Exercise regularly to strengthen knee muscles.

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