

WORLD LEPROSY DAY 2025

## Unite. Act. Eliminate.

World Leprosy Day is observed on the last Sunday of January every year. In 2025, World Leprosy Day was on 26 January. This international day is an opportunity to celebrate people who have experienced leprosy, raise awareness of the disease, and call for an end to leprosy-related stigma and discrimination.

The theme for World Leprosy Day 2025 is "Unite. Act. Eliminate." The theme is a call to action aiming to raise awareness of leprosy, highlight the challenges faced by persons affected by leprosy, and inspire collaborative action to eliminate leprosy.

**Global Commitment ("Unite"):** Eliminating leprosy requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including governments, healthcare providers, NGOs, communities, and individuals.

**Immediate Action ("Act"):** Proactive measures, including public education, early diagnosis, prevention programs, prompt treatment, and empowering persons affected by leprosy, are essential to interrupt transmission and eliminate the disease.

**A Clear Goal ("Eliminate Leprosy"):** Eliminating the disease—the World Health Organisation's global goal—is achievable with sustained commitment. Current medical interventions and collaborative efforts have brought us closer, but continued investment in diagnostics, innovative treatments, and outreach is essential.

Source: World Health Organisation



**SWEET TRAP**

# The dangers of SUGAR ADDICTION and how to break free

DR SHAHJADA SELIM

Consuming too much sugar can lead to dependency-like behaviours and serious health issues. Sugar activates the brain's reward system by releasing dopamine, creating a cycle of cravings and overeating similar to addictive substances. Over time, this can cause energy crashes, increased reliance on sugar, and withdrawal symptoms when intake is reduced.

From a health perspective, excessive sugar consumption—especially in processed and refined forms—can contribute to obesity, metabolic disorders, insulin resistance, and fatty liver disease.

It also promotes inflammation, accelerates aging, and increases the risk of chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes. Cutting back on sugar and focusing on whole, unprocessed foods can help break the cycle of dependency and improve long-term health.

### Health risks of excessive sugar consumption

**1. Metabolic Disorders:** *Insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes:* High sugar intake leads to consistently elevated blood sugar levels, causing insulin resistance, a key factor in type 2 diabetes.

**2. Mood disorders:** *High blood pressure:* Excessive sugar consumption is linked to elevated blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease.

**3. Cognitive decline:** Research suggests that high sugar intake is associated with a higher risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

**4. Fatty liver disease:** Excess fructose, often found in sugary drinks and

processed foods, is processed in the liver and converted into fat, raising the risk of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD or MAFLD).

**5. Obesity:** Sugary beverages, such as sodas and fruit juices, contribute to weight gain by adding calories without providing satiety.

### 2. Heart health risks:

**6. High blood pressure:** Excessive sugar consumption is linked to elevated blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease.

**7. Chronic inflammation and cholesterol imbalance:** High sugar intake increases LDL (bad) cholesterol while lowering HDL (good) cholesterol, contributing to cardiovascular problems.

### 3. Effects on brain and mental health

**8. Addiction-like response:** Sugar stimulates dopamine production, reinforcing cravings and encouraging overconsumption.

**9. Mood disorders:** Sugar stimulates dopamine production, reinforcing cravings and encouraging overconsumption.

### 4. Cognitive decline:

**10. Fatty liver disease:** Excess fructose, often found in sugary drinks and

processed foods, is processed in the liver and converted into fat, raising the risk of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD or MAFLD).

**11. Impact on skin and aging:** *Premature aging:* Excess sugar triggers glycation, a process that damages collagen and elastin, leading to wrinkles and sagging skin.

**12. Acne and skin issues:** High sugar levels increase insulin production and inflammation, which can worsen acne and other skin conditions.

### How to minimise sugar's harmful effects

**13. Avoid processed and sugary foods –** Reduce consumption of sodas, sweets, baked goods, and processed snacks.

**14. Read ingredient labels –** Watch for hidden sugars in packaged foods like sauces, yogurts, and cereals.

**15. Use natural sweeteners sparingly –** Replace refined sugar with alternatives such as honey, stevia, or monk fruit.

**16. Increase fiber and protein intake –** These nutrients help stabilise blood sugar and reduce sugar cravings.

**17. Stay hydrated –** Drinking plenty of water helps flush out excess sugar and prevents dehydration-related cravings.

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## Tips for managing underactive Thyroid

Hypothyroidism, or an underactive thyroid, occurs when the thyroid gland does not produce enough hormones to regulate metabolism. While some causes, such as autoimmune disorders and iodine deficiency, may not be entirely preventable, certain lifestyle choices can help maintain thyroid health and manage the condition effectively.

### PREVENTION TIPS

**Ensure sufficient iodine intake:** The thyroid relies on iodine to function properly. Include iodine-rich foods like dairy products, eggs, fish, and iodised salt in your diet.

**Maintain a balanced diet:** A well-balanced diet with selenium, zinc, and iron can support thyroid function. Brazil nuts, shellfish, and lean meats are excellent sources.

**Manage stress:** Chronic stress can affect thyroid hormone levels. Engage in stress-reducing activities like yoga, meditation, and regular exercise.

**Regular health check-ups:** Routine thyroid function tests can help detect early signs of hypothyroidism, especially if you have a family history of thyroid disorders.

### TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

**Medication:** The primary treatment for hypothyroidism is levothyroxine, a synthetic thyroid hormone. It must be taken as prescribed to maintain hormone levels.

**Dietary adjustments:** Avoid excessive consumption of soy products and cruciferous vegetables (like cabbage and broccoli), as they may interfere with thyroid function.

**Monitor your symptoms:** Fatigue, weight gain, and cold sensitivity can indicate imbalanced thyroid levels. Regular doctor visits ensure proper medication adjustments.

**Exercise regularly:** Moderate physical activity can help with weight management and improve energy levels.

By following these steps, individuals can support thyroid health and effectively manage hypothyroidism for overall well-being.

## Thriving under stress

TASHRIF AREFIN

Stress is an inevitable part of modern life. Whether it's the constant stream of notifications, work pressures, or personal challenges, stress finds a way into our daily routines. However, instead of viewing stress as an enemy, we can learn to manage it effectively and even use it to our advantage.

Stress triggers the "fight-or-flight" response, prompting the adrenal glands to release adrenaline, which increases heart rate, sharpens alertness, and redirects blood to muscles. While this reaction is life-saving in emergencies, prolonged exposure to stressors—like traffic, work pressure, or family difficulties—can lead to chronic stress, negatively affecting health.

Stress comes in two main forms: acute and chronic. Acute stress is short-term and linked to immediate challenges, such as meeting a deadline or resolving an argument. It keeps us alert and fades quickly. Chronic stress, however, results from ongoing issues like financial struggles or an unfulfilling job, weakening the immune system and increasing health risks over time.

Not all stress is harmful. Eustress, or "good stress," enhances focus and productivity, such as the motivation felt when preparing for a well-studied exam. In contrast, distress



## Eat your way to a healthy heart

A well-balanced diet plays a crucial role in protecting heart health by lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol, and preventing inflammation. Here are five diets that have been shown to support cardiovascular well-being:

**1. Mediterranean diet:** Inspired by the traditional eating habits of people in Greece and Southern Italy, this diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and olive oil. It includes moderate amounts of fish, poultry, and dairy while limiting processed foods, red meat, and added sugars. The combination of healthy fats and antioxidants helps lower the risk of heart disease.

**2. DASH diet:** Designed to combat high blood pressure, the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet promotes heart health by emphasizing whole grains, lean proteins, low-fat dairy, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. It also encourages reducing sodium intake, which can help control blood pressure levels.

**3. Plant-based diets:** Vegan and vegetarian diets focus on plant-based foods, eliminating or minimizing animal products. These diets are naturally high in fiber and antioxidants, which can lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease when based on whole, unprocessed foods.

**4. Flexitarian diet:** A more flexible approach to plant-based eating, this diet encourages primarily consuming plant foods while allowing occasional meat and dairy. It offers heart benefits similar to vegetarian diets while being easier to follow long-term.

**5. TLC diet:** The Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) diet, developed by the National Institutes of Health, is designed to lower cholesterol by promoting fiber-rich foods, healthy fats, and regular exercise. It also emphasizes reducing saturated fats and maintaining a healthy weight.

Adopting one of these heart-friendly diets can be a powerful step toward better overall health and a stronger heart.



## Things to take control of your own health

DR A M SHAMIM

This reflection highlights the progress of the healthcare sector in Bangladesh, drawing from years of experience as a physician and healthcare entrepreneur. While the focus has been on developing innovative solutions to address gaps in the health system, it also offers valuable insights.

Over the years, the healthcare sector has grown significantly. Private hospitals now have more beds than public ones, and local doctors have gained global recognition for their expertise. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of patients were treated within Bangladesh. In light of concerns over visa restrictions, it's important to note that nearly all medical needs can be effectively met within the country. Bangladesh is well-equipped to handle these challenges.

However, gaps in the system remain. Many healthcare-related dissatisfaction can be avoided by taking the following steps.

### Have a doctor or health professional as a confidant:

Think of this as having a "family doctor"—a trusted physician or healthcare professional who is a friend, not a paid service provider. This relationship is invaluable in navigating the healthcare system, providing advice during emergencies, recommending specialists, and helping make informed decisions about cost and quality. In a country where health counselling is not readily available, a trusted medical confidant is crucial.

### Set aside 3-5% of your income for healthcare:

Financial security and health are closely linked. Medical emergencies can be financially devastating, especially in Bangladesh, where out-of-pocket expenses are high. A small but consistent health fund can cover hospitalisations, medications, and diagnostic tests,

preventing financial hardship. For example, dengue fever treatment can be costly, but a dedicated health fund can reduce stress and ensure timely care.

### Maintain your personal health summary:

Keep a record of past illnesses, surgeries, allergies, medications, vaccinations, and family medical history. In Bangladesh, where medical records are often paper-based and fragmented, this is especially important. A personal health summary is invaluable in emergencies and helps doctors provide better care. Digitising this record using mobile apps or online platforms can improve accessibility, even during travel.

### Get a health check-up at least once a year:

"Prevention is better than cure." Many chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, develop silently. Annual check-ups help detect these conditions early, allowing for timely intervention and preventing serious complications. Basic tests should include blood pressure measurement, blood sugar testing, cholesterol screening, and urine analysis.

Depending on individual risk factors, additional tests may be recommended. Health packages can be chosen based on affordability.

### Trust local doctors and hospitals:

Healthcare is not a simple transaction; it requires a trusting relationship between providers and patients. Instead of being overly critical, ask your physician questions when in doubt. Avoid online gimmicks and quick fixes. Continuity of care with a trusted provider ensures better health outcomes, while frequently changing doctors can lead to fragmented care.

The media also play a role in positively communicating local healthcare capabilities. Patients can get the best treatment locally by following these simple steps, ensuring the best value for their money with confidence and peace of mind.

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## FLOSSING

### A simple habit for a healthier heart!

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), including stroke, remains the leading cause of death worldwide. While diet and exercise are well-known preventive measures, emerging research suggests that oral health—specifically flossing—may also play a role in reducing cardiovascular risk.

Flossing helps remove plaque and bacteria between the teeth, preventing gum disease and inflammation. Studies now indicate that this simple habit could also lower the risk of atrial fibrillation (AFib) and blood clot-related strokes. Researchers analysing data from thousands of participants found that those who flossed regularly had a significantly lower risk of ischaemic stroke and AFib. This suggests that maintaining good oral hygiene might protect against heart disease in ways previously underestimated.



Inflammation is a key factor in many chronic illnesses, including heart disease. Poor oral hygiene can lead to gum infections, which contribute to systemic inflammation and artery damage. By reducing oral bacteria and inflammation, flossing may help protect the cardiovascular system.

Although flossing alone will not eliminate heart disease risk, it can be an easy addition to a heart-healthy lifestyle. Alongside flossing, key preventive measures include eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy weight, and managing conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes.

Heart health is not just about diet and exercise—oral hygiene plays a role too. A few minutes of flossing each day could be a small but powerful step toward better overall health and a stronger heart.

Adopting one of these heart-friendly diets can be a powerful step toward better overall health and a stronger heart.

Adopting one of these heart-friendly diets can be a powerful step toward better cardiovascular health.