

## Scrolling into sadness: How screens disrupt teen sleep and mood

In today's digital world, screens are everywhere—from phones and tablets to computers and TVs. For many teenagers, hours spent online have become a normal part of daily life. But experts are increasingly warning that too much screen time may be affecting more than just eyesight or attention spans—it may also be harming sleep and mental health.

A new study published in *PLOS Global Public Health* has found that excessive screen use among adolescents can lead to poor sleep, which in turn raises the risk of depression—particularly in girls.

Researchers from Sweden's Karolinska Institutet followed 4,810 students aged 12 to 16 for a year. They tracked the teens' screen habits, sleep quality, and signs of depression



at three points in time. The results showed that teens who spent more time on screens experienced worse sleep within just three months. They went to bed later, slept less, and had lower-quality sleep overall.

This disturbed sleep pattern was closely linked to rising depression symptoms over time. For girls, sleep problems explained nearly half of the connection between screen time and depression. Among boys, screen time also disrupted sleep, but it had a more direct (though weaker) link to depression.

The findings support existing advice—like that from Sweden's Public Health Agency—that teens should limit leisure screen time to 2–3 hours daily. Reducing screen time, researchers say, could help improve both sleep and mental well-being in young people.

## WORLD HEALTH DAY 2025 Spotlight on women and babies' survival, urging solidarity at a critical moment for global health

### STAR HEALTH DESK

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially announced the theme of World Health Day 2025, **Healthy beginnings, hopeful futures**, which will focus on improving maternal and newborn health and survival.

World Health Day is marked around the world on 7<sup>th</sup> April, the anniversary of WHO's founding in 1948. Each year, it draws attention to a specific health topic of concern to people all over the world.

"The focus of this campaign comes at a crucial moment, aiming to help countries regain lost progress while showcasing new research and evidence that will enhance the health of women and babies globally," said Dr Anshu Banerjee, Director of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing at WHO. "It will also be an opportunity to step up support and collaboration for global health – and deliver hope to those in urgent need of lifesaving care."

### Helping every woman and baby survive and thrive:

According to the most recent estimates, close to 300,000 women lose their lives due to pregnancy or childbirth each year; over 2 million babies die in their first month of life, and around 2 million more are stillborn. This is roughly 1 preventable death every 7 seconds – losses which bring tremendous sadness and heartache to millions of families around the world.

While maternal and newborn deaths occur in all regions, the vast majority are in the poorest countries and those facing conflict and other crises. When healthcare facilities close, are attacked, or supplies are disrupted, pregnant women and babies face severe, often life-threatening risks.

Based on current trends, 4 out of 5 countries are off track to meet



the United Nations' global targets for improving maternal survival by 2030; 1 in 3 will fail to meet targets for reducing newborn deaths. Current funding constraints could further jeopardise progress, as many programmes providing critical health services have stalled alongside important medical research.

This year's campaign, which will run until 2026, will urge governments, donors and the health community to invest in proven, high impact interventions. These include pregnancy-related services to detect complications and lifesaving emergency obstetrics, as well as special care for small and preterm babies. Complications relating to prematurity are now the leading cause of death of children under 5 worldwide.

WHO will also highlight the evolving need for health systems to address the many underlying health issues that impact maternal and newborn health. These include not only direct obstetric complications but also mental health conditions, malnutrition, and an increasing burden of noncommunicable diseases.

### Listening to women and supporting families:

The campaign will urge increased global attention to women's longer-

term health and well-being. This includes advocating for laws and policies that safeguard their health and rights, such as paid maternity leave, employment protections, and access to family planning services.

"It is not sufficient that women survive childbirth; they must also be able to enjoy their lives in good health," said Dr Pascale Allotey, Director for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research at WHO.

Efforts are also needed to address the particular risks of climate change for pregnant women and newborns.

### An investment, not a cost:

In low- and middle-income countries, every US\$1 invested in maternal and newborn health is estimated to yield US\$9 to 20 in return.

WHO is supporting maternal and newborn health programmes through:

- Intensive support to 55 countries through the Every Woman Every Newborn Everywhere initiative;
- Guidance across pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period;
- Research to improve clinical care;
- Support during humanitarian emergencies;
- Strengthening the role of midwives.

Source: World Health Organisation

## Next-gen insulin could ease type 2 diabetes

Living with type 2 diabetes often means constant effort – checking blood sugar levels, planning meals, and injecting insulin daily. For many, this routine can be overwhelming. But a recent study offers hope in the form of smarter technology that can ease this burden.

Published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the study looked at automated insulin delivery systems – small wearable devices that continuously monitor blood sugar levels and adjust insulin doses throughout the day and night. This technology has been available for people with type 1 diabetes for years, but until now, it had not been widely studied for those with type 2 diabetes who rely on insulin.

For people who switched to these



systems, managing diabetes became simpler and more stable. They no longer had to guess how much insulin they needed or worry as much about sudden spikes or drops in blood sugar. Instead, the system did the adjusting for them, helping maintain a steadier blood sugar level throughout the day.

This is particularly encouraging for those who struggle to keep their diabetes under control, even with multiple medications or traditional insulin pumps. The study showed that the benefits were seen across different types of patients – including older adults and those with other health conditions.

While this technology may not yet be accessible to everyone due to cost or availability, it represents a step forward in diabetes care. For individuals managing type 2 diabetes with insulin, it could mean fewer injections, better blood sugar control, and improved quality of life.

## PRE-DIABETES: a second chance to take control of your health

### STAR HEALTH DESK

Many people underestimate pre-diabetes, often dismissing it as a minor issue. But the truth is, pre-diabetes is a critical warning sign—and an opportunity to make lifestyle changes before serious health problems develop.

### What is pre-diabetes?

Pre-diabetes is a condition where blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be diagnosed as type 2 diabetes. According to global estimates, millions of people are living with pre-diabetes, many without even knowing it. Left unaddressed, pre-diabetes can lead to type 2 diabetes and significantly increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney problems, and nerve damage.

### Warning signs you should not ignore:

Pre-diabetes often develops gradually and may not present obvious symptoms. However, there are some subtle signs that can signal a problem with blood sugar regulation, such as:

- Unexplained weight gain
- High blood pressure
- Persistent cravings for sugary or processed foods
- Frequent heartburn or acid reflux
- Elevated cholesterol levels
- Fatigue or occasional blurred vision

Recognising and responding to these symptoms early can prevent long-term complications and may even reverse pre-diabetes altogether.



### Why early action matters:

Pre-diabetes represents a turning point. One path leads toward chronic disease and medication. The other offers a chance to restore health and prevent future illness. The good news? Making small, consistent lifestyle changes can have a significant impact.

Research shows that people with pre-diabetes who adopt healthy habits—such as improving their diet, increasing physical activity, and losing even a modest amount of weight—can reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by more than 50%.

### Your plan for reversing pre-diabetes:

There is no single "cure" for pre-diabetes, but comprehensive lifestyle adjustments can bring blood sugar levels back to a healthy range. Here are six key steps to consider:

1. Prioritise regular check-ups - Routine

blood tests, including A1C, fasting glucose, and cholesterol, help you track your progress and stay informed.

2. Cut sugary beverages - Sodas, fruit juices, and energy drinks can quickly spike blood sugar. Swap them out for water, herbal teas, or unsweetened drinks.

3. Choose whole foods - Limit processed foods, refined carbs, and sugary snacks. Focus on vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.

4. Move daily - Regular physical activity helps the body use insulin more effectively. Even 30 minutes of walking per day can make a big difference.

5. Break harmful habits - Quit smoking, reduce alcohol intake, and avoid late-night eating. These behaviors can worsen insulin resistance.

6. Stay positive and committed - A positive mindset helps reinforce healthy routines. Set realistic goals and celebrate small wins along the way.

### The takeaway:

Pre-diabetes does not have to progress to type 2 diabetes. With timely intervention, it is often possible to reverse the condition. By taking control of your health today—through nutrition, movement, and regular monitoring—you can lower your risk of future complications and improve your overall well-being.

Pre-diabetes is not a diagnosis to fear, but a call to action. The power to change the future of your health is in your hands—starting now.

### MAZHARUL ALAM

World Health Day, observed on April 7, is often portrayed as a day to highlight the limitations of traditional healthcare systems. While such critique is necessary for progress, the day should also inspire ideas for improving human health. Four major noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)—cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes—account for over 80% of premature NCD-related deaths.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that 85% of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, making NCDs the leading cause of mortality globally. This rising burden demands effective prevention strategies. Yoga and pranayama have emerged as scientifically validated tools for disease prevention and overall well-being. This article explores their effectiveness in tackling NCDs, economic benefits of prevention, and how countries have incorporated yoga into public health.

### The growing burden of NCDs:

NCDs are responsible for approximately 41 million deaths annually, making up 74% of all global deaths. Major risk factors include:

- Unhealthy diet
- Physical inactivity
- Tobacco use and alcohol consumption
- Chronic stress and mental health disorders

### Global statistics on NCD mortality:

- Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs): 17.9 million deaths annually.
- Cancer: 9.6 million deaths per year.
- Chronic respiratory diseases: 4 million deaths, mainly COPD and asthma.
- Diabetes: 1.5 million deaths yearly.

### How yoga counters NCDs:

Yoga provides natural, cost-effective methods to improve physical health, mental clarity, and emotional balance.

1. Cardiovascular diseases and yoga - Yoga reduces stress, improves heart rate variability, lowers blood pressure, and decreases LDL cholesterol. A meta-analysis of 32 studies found significant reductions in systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

2. Yoga in cancer prevention and recovery - Yoga enhances immunity, reduces inflammation, and improves patients' quality of life. A trial showed breast cancer patients practicing yoga experienced a 50% reduction in stress-related cytokines.

3. Respiratory diseases and yoga therapy - Pranayama increases lung function, reduces

airway resistance, and strengthens respiratory muscles.

4. Yoga's role in diabetes management - Yoga improves insulin sensitivity, regulates glucose metabolism, and lowers HbA1c. It also helps lower blood sugar in non-insulin-dependent diabetics and reduces medication needs. Yoga is now included in many cardiac rehab programmes.

### Investment in prevention vs. treatment:

Treating NCDs could cost over \$47 trillion by 2030. Investing in preventive measures like yoga significantly reduces healthcare costs and enhances quality of life.

### Global adoption of yoga in public health:

- U.S.: AHA recommends yoga; NCI supports research; workplaces report reduced stress and absenteeism (Frontiers in Public Health, 2024).
- Canada, Japan, Germany: Yoga included in public initiatives, workplace wellness, and insurance programmes.
- Nordic Countries: Promoted in schools and workplaces for holistic health.
- India: Through International Day of Yoga and AYUSH Ministry.
- UAE and Saudi Arabia: Integrated into national health strategies.

### Why WHO and policymakers should promote yoga:

While existing healthcare investments are essential for NCD management, they have not been sufficient to curb their rising prevalence. Despite trillions spent on treatments, NCD rates continue to rise, highlighting the urgent need for cost-effective preventive approaches like yoga. Yoga stands out as an effective solution because:

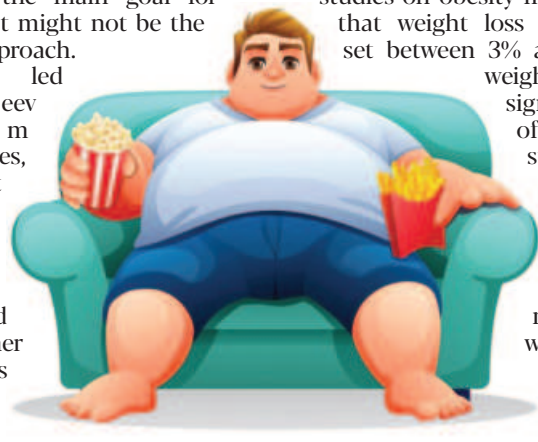
- Yoga is easy to learn and practice. It requires minimal guidance and can be taught within weeks.
- Yoga is cost-effective. Unlike pharmaceutical treatments, yoga needs no continuous expenditure, making it ideal for low-income nations. Yoga requires no machines or expensive equipment, making it a low-investment intervention.
- Yoga is accessible to all ages. Even elderly individuals can practise gentle yoga techniques. Yoga is a proven preventive tool against NCDs. By prioritising yoga in public health strategies, we can reduce disease prevalence, lower costs, and improve well-being worldwide.

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## Rethinking weight loss targets in obesity treatment: A shift toward holistic health

New research to be presented at the European Congress on Obesity (ECO 2025) suggests that focusing on percentage weight loss as the main goal for obesity treatment might not be the most effective approach.

The study, led by Dr Sanjeev Sockalingam and colleagues, highlights that weight loss programmes often fail to meet their set targets and overlook other important factors like improving obesity-related



health issues, quality of life, and physical and social well-being.

The research, which reviews 30 studies on obesity management, finds that weight loss goals are mostly set between 3% and 10% of body weight. However, a significant number of participants struggle to achieve these goals. Some studies show that only one-third of participants reach a 10% weight loss target. The review reveals that the commonly

used 5% weight loss goal, originally based on a small number of studies, is often unrealistic for many people with obesity.

Instead of focusing solely on weight reduction, the authors suggest that obesity treatment should emphasise improving health outcomes related to obesity, such as reducing complications, enhancing quality of life, and improving physical and social functioning. This patient-centred approach would provide a more meaningful measure of success.

This work has been reviewed for presentation at the ECO 2025 conference and underscores the importance of broadening the scope of obesity management beyond just weight loss to better address the complexities of living with obesity.

Source: European Congress on Obesity, ECO 2025