

## Nighttime habits that help you burn fat and sleep better

Losing weight is not just about what you eat or how much you exercise—it is also about the small habits you follow at night. Your evening routine can have a surprising impact on your weight goals. Here is how to make your nights work in your favour:

**1. Keep yourself occupied:** Late-night snacking often happens out of boredom. Instead of heading to the kitchen, stay engaged with low-stress activities like reading, journaling, doing crafts, or catching up with a friend. Keeping your mind active can reduce the urge to eat unnecessarily.

**2. Get better sleep:** Not sleeping well can throw off your hunger hormones and lead to overeating the next day. Aim for 7–9 hours of restful sleep. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, and keep your room dark and quiet to promote deeper sleep.

**3. Exercise early in the evening:** Physical activity boosts metabolism and helps reduce stress. Try not to do high-intensity workouts right before bed, as they can leave you too energised to fall asleep easily. A light walk or stretching is better late at night.

**4. Avoid late meals and snacks:** Eating



right before bed can lead to weight gain, especially if the food choices are unhealthy. Try to finish your last meal at least two to three hours before sleeping. Brushing your teeth after dinner can also help you resist the urge to snack.

**5. Plan your next day's meals:** Packing your lunch the night before helps you avoid high-calorie meals the next day. Include whole grains, lean proteins, vegetables, and healthy fats for a balanced meal.

**6. Reduce screen time and stress:** Watching TV or using your phone during meals can distract you from how much you are eating. Also, try relaxation techniques like deep breathing or meditation before bed to lower stress, which can contribute to belly fat.

With a few simple nighttime changes, you can support your weight loss journey and feel better overall.

# Global guidelines released for Meningitis diagnosis and care

STAR HEALTH DESK

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has released its first global guidelines for the diagnosis, treatment, and care of meningitis, aiming to accelerate detection, ensure timely treatment, and enhance long-term care. The guidelines bring together evidence-based recommendations to reduce the deaths and disabilities associated with the disease.

Despite the availability of effective treatments and vaccines against certain types of meningitis, the disease remains a major global health threat. Bacterial meningitis, the deadliest form, can become fatal within 24 hours. In 2019, there were an estimated 2.5 million cases globally, including 1.6 million cases of bacterial meningitis, leading to approximately 240,000 deaths.

About 20% of those who contract bacterial meningitis develop long-term complications that affect quality of life. The disease also imposes heavy financial and social burdens on individuals, families, and communities.

"Bacterial meningitis kills one in six of the people it strikes and leaves many others with lasting health challenges," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. "Implementing these new guidelines will help save lives, improve long-term care for those affected by meningitis, and strengthen health systems."

Meningitis can affect people of any age and in any location, but the burden is especially high in low- and middle-income countries and in areas prone to large-scale epidemics. The sub-Saharan African region, known as the 'meningitis belt', remains at high risk of recurrent meningococcal meningitis outbreaks.

The new guidelines offer comprehensive recommendations for managing acute community-acquired meningitis in children over one month old, adolescents, and adults.



They address all aspects of clinical care, including diagnosis, antibiotic therapy, adjunctive treatment, supportive care, and management of long-term effects. The guidelines cover both bacterial and viral causes, acknowledging the similarities in their clinical presentation and treatment approaches.

Designed for both non-epidemic and epidemic scenarios, the new document replaces the 2014 WHO guidelines focused on outbreak response. Given the disease's disproportionate impact in low-resource settings, these updated guidelines are tailored to be implementable in low- and middle-income countries.

They are intended for healthcare professionals at first- and second-level facilities, including emergency, inpatient, and outpatient services. Policymakers, health planners, academic institutions, and civil society organisations may also use them for education, research, and capacity-building initiatives.

The launch of these guidelines supports the WHO's broader Defeating Meningitis by 2030 Global

Roadmap, adopted in 2020. This roadmap sets ambitious targets: to eliminate bacterial meningitis epidemics, reduce vaccine-preventable cases by 50% and deaths by 70%, and improve life quality for those affected.

Achieving these goals requires coordinated action across five key areas:

- **Diagnosis and treatment:** Enhancing early detection and clinical management.
- **Prevention and epidemic control:** Expanding affordable vaccine access and strengthening outbreak responses.
- **Disease surveillance:** Improving monitoring systems.
- **Care and support:** Ensuring early identification of long-term effects and access to care.
- **Advocacy and engagement:** Raising political commitment and public awareness.

With the release of these guidelines, WHO offers countries a critical tool to close existing gaps in meningitis care, paving the way for faster detection, timely treatment, and better long-term outcomes.

Source: World Health Organisation

RUNNING STRONGER, SAFER:

## What is behind the drop in cardiac deaths?

Long-distance running continues to attract millions, and while it is known for boosting cardiovascular fitness, rare but serious heart-related emergencies can still occur during races. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) highlights an important trend: although the risk of sudden cardiac arrest during marathons and half-marathons has remained steady over the years, the likelihood of dying from one has significantly decreased.

This improvement points to better emergency preparedness at race events, increased availability of defibrillators, quicker CPR response, and possibly earlier identification of heart risks among runners. Common underlying causes of cardiac arrest in these settings include coronary artery disease, congenital heart abnormalities, and conditions like hypertrophic cardiomyopathy—many of



which may be asymptomatic until a crisis occurs.

Unexplained cardiac arrest also remains a notable concern, particularly when standard testing or autopsies do not reveal a clear cause. This highlights the importance of pre-participation screenings, especially for those with a family history of heart disease or symptoms like chest pain or fainting during exercise.

The findings reinforce that while endurance running is generally safe, awareness and preparedness are key. Race organisers, medical teams, and runners themselves all play a role in minimising risks. As long-distance events grow in popularity, ongoing education about heart health and emergency response can help keep runners both motivated and protected.

## Emotional first aid: Why we need to treat psychological wounds like physical ones

SRINJOYA JUNAN

If you got a deep cut, you would clean it and apply a bandage. But what do you do when you experience emotional pain—like rejection or failure? We have been taught how to maintain our physical health and practice dental hygiene since childhood. But how much do we really know about maintaining our psychological well-being? Why do we devote more time to caring for our teeth than nurturing our minds?

We experience psychological injuries—such as failure, rejection, or loneliness—even more frequently than physical ones. And just like physical wounds, they can worsen if left untreated, significantly affecting our lives. Yet, despite scientifically proven methods to heal these emotional wounds, we often neglect them. Imagine telling someone with a severe infection, "Just ignore it; your immune system will take care of it." Yet, when it comes to emotional pain, we dismiss it with, "Oh, you are feeling depressed? Get over it."

**The problem: why we ignore emotional pain**—People often prioritise physical health over mental health because emotional wounds are not as visible as physical injuries. Winch (2014) explains that while most people instinctively treat a physical wound, they fail to recognise psychological wounds like rejection or failure, allowing them to worsen over time. Unlike physical injuries, the consequences of emotional pain often appear gradually. Nolen-Hoeksema (1991) found that unresolved emotional pain can lead to rumination and increased risk of depression, but because the impact is not immediate, people tend to dismiss it until it becomes overwhelming.

**The consequences of neglecting emotional wounds**—Emotional wounds, like rejection, leave a deep psychological impact, distorting our perceptions and clouding our thoughts. They make us believe that others care about us far less than they actually do. This fear holds us back from reaching out—after all, why risk more rejection and heartache when you are already struggling with pain that feels unbearable?

You can be in a sea full of people and still feel lonely because it depends solely on whether you feel emotionally or socially disconnected from those around you. Loneliness does not just make you miserable—it can be life-threatening. Research shows that chronic loneliness increases the risk of early death by 14%. It contributes to high blood pressure and high cholesterol and even weakens the immune system, leaving you more vulnerable to illness.

Like loneliness, failure is also a psychological wound that distorts and misleads us. A lot of people who fail at something start believing, "I am not smart enough. I will never succeed." By neglecting emotional wounds, we often get stuck in a habit called rumination. It is what happens when you make a mistake, and you can not stop replaying the moment in your mind. Ruminating in this way can become a very unhealthy habit, putting you at risk for clinical depression, alcoholism, eating disorders, and cardiovascular disease.

**How to practise emotional first aid**—Be attentive to emotional pain—recognise it when it happens. Cognitive reframing helps—change "I failed" to "I can learn from this". Monitor your self-esteem and practice self-compassion. Kristin Neff (2003) found self-compassion reduces anxiety, depression, and rumination. Disrupt negative thoughts with a positive distraction. And just as we see a doctor for physical injuries, seek professional help for emotional distress.

Next time you face emotional pain, will you ignore it or treat it with the care it deserves?

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## New guidance calls for urgent transformation of mental health policies



The World Health Organisation (WHO) has launched new guidance aimed at helping countries strengthen their mental health policies and systems. Mental health services worldwide remain underfunded, with significant gaps in access and quality. In some countries, up to 90% of people with severe mental health conditions receive no care, and many existing services rely on outdated institutional models that fail to meet international human rights standards.

The guidance provides a clear framework to transform mental health services, ensuring quality care is accessible to all. It focuses on five key areas for reform: leadership and governance, service organisation, workforce development, person-centred interventions, and addressing social and structural determinants of mental health. The guidance promotes a holistic approach, addressing not just mental health but also lifestyle, physical health, and the social and economic factors that influence mental well-being.

This guidance is designed to be flexible, allowing countries to tailor their mental health policies based on their national context, needs, and available resources. Developed in consultation with global experts, policymakers, and individuals with lived experience, it builds on the WHO QualityRights initiative, which advocates for a person-centred, recovery-orientated approach to mental health. WHO has committed to supporting countries in implementing these strategies through technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives.

Source: World Health Organisation

## Beat the headache: Top treatments and tips for lasting relief

STAR HEALTH DESK

Headaches are a common yet disruptive ailment, ranging from mild discomfort to severe pain. With various types, each with distinct triggers and symptoms, it is essential to understand your condition to manage it effectively. Here is a guide to the most common headache types and their treatments, plus tips for prevention.

**1. Tension headaches:** Tension headaches are the most frequent type. They feel like a dull, constant ache, often around the forehead or temples, and may result from stress, poor posture, or muscle strain. Symptoms include mild to moderate pain without nausea. Over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers like ibuprofen or acetaminophen often provide relief. For chronic cases, doctors may recommend antidepressants or muscle relaxants.

**2. Migraines:** Migraines are intense, throbbing headaches, usually affecting one side of the head, often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light and sound. They can last from 4 to 72 hours and may be preceded by visual disturbances known as an aura. Treating migraines involves NSAIDs, triptans, and preventive measures like beta-blockers or anti-seizure medications. Identifying triggers—such as hormonal changes or specific foods—can help reduce frequency.

**3. Cluster headaches:** Cluster headaches are rare but extremely

painful, often occurring in cycles. The pain is sharp and usually felt around one eye or temple, with accompanying symptoms like redness or watering of the eye. Oxygen therapy provides quick relief, and triptans or corticosteroids can reduce the frequency of attacks. Verapamil is commonly used for long-term prevention.

**4. Sinus headaches:** Sinus headaches are caused by sinus infections or inflammation. Pain is felt in the forehead, cheeks, or around the nose, worsening when bending over. Treating the underlying sinus infection with antibiotics or decongestants can relieve the headache. If the sinus headache persists, stronger medications may be necessary.

**5. Rebound headaches:** Overusing pain medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen can lead to rebound headaches, causing daily or frequent headaches. The pain is typically dull and constant, often accompanied by irritability. The best solution is to stop using pain-relieving medications under the guidance of a doctor.

**6. Hypnic headaches:** Hypnic headaches, also called "alarm clock headaches", wake people from sleep, typically in the older population. The pain is dull or throbbing and may occur at the same time each night. Treatment options include caffeine or medications like lithium.

**7. Cervicogenic headaches:** Cervicogenic headaches are caused by neck issues like muscle tension or

poor posture. The pain starts at the base of the skull and spreads upward. Treatments often include physical therapy, neck exercises, and pain-relief medications.

**Preventing headaches:** Understanding your headache triggers is key to prevention. Common triggers include stress, certain foods, alcohol, bright lights, and weather changes. Keeping a headache diary can help identify patterns, allowing you to avoid or manage these triggers effectively. Lifestyle habits, such as regular exercise, staying hydrated, and maintaining a regular sleep schedule, are also important in reducing headache frequency.

**Alternative treatments:** In addition to conventional treatments, some alternative therapies, including osteopathy, acupuncture, and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), can help manage headache pain, particularly for tension headaches. These treatments focus on the mind-body connection and stress reduction.

Headaches, though common, can be managed effectively with the right treatment. Whether through medications, lifestyle changes, or alternative therapies, it is possible to reduce the frequency and intensity of headaches. Working with your healthcare provider to develop a personalised plan can ensure long-term relief, allowing you to regain control over your life and minimise the impact of headaches.

## Simple mindfulness techniques for stress relief and better well-being

DR NUR-A-SAFRINA RAHMAN

Mindfulness is a powerful practice that can enhance mental and physical health. It involves focusing on the present moment and cultivating awareness without judgement. Several techniques can help you incorporate mindfulness into your daily routine for better well-being.

• **Deep breathing:** One of the simplest ways to practise mindfulness is through deep breathing. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, letting your belly rise. Exhale slowly through your mouth. Focus entirely on your breath, letting go of any thoughts or distractions. This technique helps to calm the nervous system and reduce stress.

• **Body scan:** The body scan is a technique where you mentally "scan" your body from head to toe, paying attention to each part without judgement. Start at the top of your head and slowly move down, noticing any areas of tension or discomfort. Breathe into these areas to release tension. This practice can increase body awareness and promote relaxation.

• **Mindful walking:** This technique involves paying full attention to each step as you walk. Focus on the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the movement of your legs, and your breathing. Whether you are walking indoors or outside, let go of all distractions and immerse yourself in the present moment. Mindful walking promotes both physical and mental

well-being.

• **Guided meditation:** In guided meditation, an instructor or an app leads you through a series of exercises designed to help you focus and relax. These can include visualisation techniques, breathing exercises, or mindful awareness practices. Guided sessions are especially useful for beginners who need structure in their practice.

Regularly practising mindfulness techniques can reduce stress, improve emotional health, and enhance overall well-being. Each practice fosters mindfulness, helping you stay present and calm in daily life.

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