

Scorched at work: Global report revealed dire heat risks for workers

A joint report released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) exposed the growing dangers of extreme heat on workers' health and productivity worldwide. Titled Climate Change and Workplace Heat Stress, the guidance underscored how climate change had already intensified heatwaves, putting billions—particularly manual labourers in sectors like agriculture, construction, and fisheries—at serious risk.

Drawing from five decades of research, the report revealed that worker productivity dropped by 2-3% for every degree above 20°C. It also linked rising temperatures to serious health problems, including heatstroke, kidney damage, and neurological disorders. Vulnerable populations, such as older adults, children, and low-income workers, were shown to suffer the most.

The year 2024 marked the hottest on record, with some regions experiencing temperatures beyond 50°C. In response, the WHO and WMO urged urgent global action. Their recommendations included developing local heat health action plans, training health professionals to recognise heat stress, and incorporating affordable, sustainable



technologies to protect workers.

The report echoed findings from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which estimated that 2.4 billion workers were exposed to excessive heat, contributing to over 22 million heat-related injuries annually.

By calling for immediate implementation of policies and cross-sector collaboration, the WHO, WMO, and ILO aimed to protect workers, promote economic stability, and advance climate resilience—emphasising that safeguarding worker health in a warming world was no longer optional, but essential.

Source: World Health Organisation



MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Simple daily habits for a stronger, happier you

TAHMINA AHMED

Life today is full of stress, anger, work pressure, and career demands. We all face these challenges, and that is why it is so important that we learn how to take care of our mental health. Simple daily habits can really help calm our minds and improve how we feel overall.

One thing that helps a lot is meditation. It cools down our brain and clears our mind, giving us a chance to breathe and find some peace during hectic days. Along with that, doing breathing exercises helps get enough oxygen to our brain so we can focus better and feel more relaxed.

Writing in a journal every day about how things are going can be surprisingly healing. It lets us get our feelings out and makes our thoughts less messy.

Getting at least 15 minutes of sunlight and a 30-minute walk daily

can boost both our body and mind. Drinking enough water and getting good sleep are just as important for keeping us mentally and physically strong.

Talking to ourselves positively is powerful too. Writing down good things about ourselves or things we have done well each day helps us build confidence and appreciate who we are.

And let us never forget our hobbies, like spending 20 to 30 minutes a day doing what we love, like gardening, painting, singing, or cooking. Our hobbies are like extra fuel for our soul, giving us a reason to keep going when times are tough.

Sharing how we feel is very important. We should try to be open to family or friends whenever we can. If that is not possible, spending time with pets like cats, dogs, or birds can help lighten the emotional load. We are social beings, and sharing our emotions, whether with people or

animals, is key to feeling better.

If things feel overwhelming, we should not hesitate to get professional help. Seeing a psychologist at the right time can truly change our lives and help us live better.

Mental health problems in Bangladesh are increasing rapidly. The World Health Organisation reports that over 6 million people here suffer from depression and nearly 7 million from anxiety. Sadly, more than 10,000 people take their own lives each year, and among teenagers, many have thought about suicide.

Taking the right step at the right time can make a huge difference and lead to a happier life.

So, let us find the courage to care for ourselves and support each other. Our mental health is the foundation of a happier, healthier life.

The writer is the Lead Clinical Psychologist at SoulCare Counselling. E-mail: ahmed.dheug@gmail.com

Structured exercise improves outcomes after colon cancer treatment

Emerging evidence has long suggested that regular physical activity may positively impact cancer recovery, but definitive clinical proof has been limited. A large phase 3 randomised trial published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* now provides strong evidence that structured exercise can significantly improve outcomes for colon cancer patients.

In this multicentre study, individuals with resected colon cancer who had completed chemotherapy were assigned to either a structured exercise programme or a standard health-education plan over three years. The goal was to determine whether exercise could extend the time patients remained cancer-free.

The findings were clear: those who engaged in regular, guided physical activity experienced better disease-free survival than those who received only general health information. Furthermore, data indicated that overall survival was also likely improved in the exercise group, suggesting not only delayed recurrence but also a possible reduction in cancer-related mortality.

While the exercise group did report a higher rate of musculoskeletal issues, these were manageable and outweighed by the survival benefits observed.

This trial marks a significant step forward in cancer care by providing high level evidence that structured, long-term exercise following chemotherapy can enhance both recovery and long-term health outcomes in colon cancer survivors. These results highlight the importance of integrating physical activity into survivorship plans and suggest that exercise is more than just supportive care—it can be a vital component of treatment strategy.



Treatments for thinning hair: What works and what does not

STAR HEALTH DESK

Thinning hair can be frustrating and emotionally challenging, but several treatments are available that can help slow the process and, in some cases, even regrow lost hair. While there is no complete cure for baldness, a variety of medical and non-medical options can be effective in managing hair loss.

Minoxidil is the only over-the-counter medication approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use by both men and women. It is available in liquid, foam, and oral forms. Minoxidil works best for individuals under the age of 40 who have only recently started losing their hair. Although the exact way it works is still unclear, it has been shown to promote hair growth in about two-thirds of users. Minoxidil must be applied to the scalp twice a day, and visible results may take several months. It is important to note that minoxidil does not cure baldness—once treatment is stopped, hair loss resumes. Some users may experience mild scalp irritation, especially with the stronger 5 per cent formula.

Finasteride, sold under the brand name Propecia, is a prescription medication that works by blocking dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a hormone responsible for male pattern baldness. Finasteride is highly effective, slowing or stopping hair loss in nearly 90 per cent of men and helping two-thirds regrow some hair. It is taken as a daily pill and can be used alone or in combination with minoxidil. Like minoxidil, its benefits stop when treatment is discontinued. A small number of men may experience sexual side effects, such as erectile dysfunction, although

these effects usually reverse after stopping the medication.

Biotin, a B vitamin, is essential for healthy hair. A deficiency in biotin can lead to hair loss, but taking high doses does not necessarily result in additional hair growth. Despite this, hair supplements such as Viviscal and Nutrafol, which contain biotin and other ingredients, have shown some success in promoting hair growth in clinical studies.

Low-Level Laser Therapy (LLLT) is another option that involves using devices like laser combs, caps, or helmets. The theory is that laser light stimulates hair follicles, encouraging growth. Although some people have reported positive results, there is still not enough scientific evidence to fully support the effectiveness of LLLT in treating hair loss.

It is important to understand that not all hair loss is caused by genetics. Sudden or severe hair loss can be a sign of underlying health problems, such as hormonal imbalances, illness, medication side effects, or deficiencies in iron or vitamin D. In such cases, it is essential to consult a healthcare provider to identify the underlying cause.

Early treatment offers the best chance of slowing hair loss and encouraging regrowth. Combining therapies such as minoxidil and finasteride may improve results. However, success requires consistent use and patience, as visible improvements can take several months.

If you are unsure about the cause of your hair loss or which treatment is right for you, it is best to consult a dermatologist for a full evaluation and a personalised treatment plan.



BREAST CANCER:

A global threat requiring early action

Breast cancer is a disease in which abnormal breast cells grow uncontrollably, often forming tumours. These cells typically originate in the milk ducts or lobules of the breast. In its earliest stages (in situ), breast cancer is not life-threatening and can be detected and treated early. However, once the cancer becomes invasive, it can spread to surrounding tissues and distant organs (metastasis), making it potentially fatal.

Breast cancer affects women in every country and at any age after puberty, though rates increase with age. Men can also develop breast cancer, although it is rare. Early detection—through awareness of symptoms and regular screening—combined with timely treatment is key to improving survival and reducing mortality.

A number of risk factors contribute to the development of breast cancer, including age, obesity, alcohol use, family history, certain genetic mutations (e.g., BRCA1, BRCA2), and hormonal factors. However, around half of breast cancer cases occur in women with no specific risk factors beyond being female and over the age of 40.

Key facts:

- Breast cancer caused an estimated 670,000 deaths globally in 2022.
- Around 50% of breast cancers occur in women with



no specific risk factors beyond age and gender.

- Breast cancer was the most common cancer in women in 157 out of 185 countries in 2022.
- Breast cancer occurs worldwide, affecting women across all regions.
- About 0.5-1% of breast cancers occur in men.
- Early diagnosis and access to comprehensive treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care are essential to reduce the global burden of breast cancer.

Source: World Health Organisation

Bridging Gaps Through Social Enterprise

The Daily Star (TDS): How do Grameen Danone's nutrition products improve health outcomes for vulnerable populations, and what evidence supports these claims?

Dipesh Nag (DN): Our mission is to combat malnutrition, particularly among children in low-income communities. Our flagship product, Shokti Doi, is a fortified yogurt enriched with essential micronutrients like Iron, Zinc, Vitamin A, and Iodine. For instance, in our 'School Feeding Program' at Ullapara, we observed an increase in student attendance from 76% to 94%, even accounting for absenteeism due to sickness. After introducing regular yogurt distribution, teachers and parents reported noticeable improvements in children's energy levels, concentration and overall health. These outcomes align with global evidence that fortified dairy products can significantly enhance cognitive and physical development in malnourished children.

TDS: What pricing, packaging, and distribution innovations have made your products both affordable and accessible for low-income families?

DN: Affordability and accessibility are at the heart of our model. We offer Shokti Doi in small, single-serve cups priced to align with the purchasing power of rural households. To balance social impact with commercial sustainability, we employ a tiered packaging strategy: smaller, low-cost units for rural areas and larger, premium variants for urban markets. This cross-subsidy approach allows us to reinvest profits from urban sales into expanding rural outreach. Our plastic spoon recycling initiative collects used yogurt cups and converts them into food-grade spoons, prioritising sustainability.

TDS: How has community engagement shaped your product design and delivery strategies to ensure cultural appropriateness and long-term adoption?

DN: Community feedback is integral to our process. We conduct regular interactions with mothers to refine flavors, packaging, and messaging. For example, we learned that children prefer mildly sweetened yogurt, leading us to adjust our



recipe while maintaining the right nutritional value. To drive adoption, we organise puppet shows, hygiene workshops, and school events that educate families about nutrition. These efforts have fostered trust and ensured our products align with local tastes and lifestyles, enabling long-term behavioral change.

TDS: What lessons have you learned about balancing commercial viability with social impact in the nutrition sector?

DN: The key lesson is that purpose and profit can and must coexist. As a social enterprise, we embed impact into every business decision—from sourcing local ingredients to designing inclusive pricing. Community-based sourcing and local value chain is not a compromise rather

it is a competitive advantage. By working directly with dairy farmers, we reduce costs while ensuring quality and creating shared value. This approach allows us to deliver affordable nutrition without compromising on sustainability.

We measure success not just in financial terms, but in the lives we improve. This dual focus has enabled us to scale our impact while maintaining a viable business model—demonstrating that doing good and doing well can, and must, go hand in hand.

This content has been published under 'Catalyzing Markets' - a media campaign jointly initiated by iDE and The Daily Star. This interview is conducted by Md. Zahidur Rabbi

iDE, a global nonprofit organisation in 12 countries since 1984, drives poverty reduction through market-driven solutions in Bangladesh, scaling agriculture, WASH, climate resilience, clean energy, and women's empowerment.