

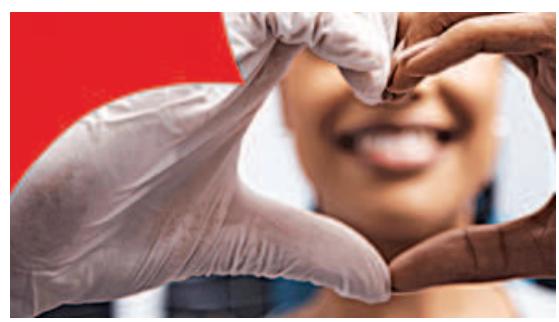
World Heart Federation marks 25 years of World Heart Day with global drive against cardiovascular disease

STAR HEALTH DESK

The World Heart Federation (WHF) has launched *Don't Miss a Beat*, a global campaign marking the 25th anniversary of World Heart Day. The initiative highlights the growing toll of cardiovascular disease (CVD), which causes 20.5 million deaths annually, more than one-third of global mortality.

Through partnerships with sports organisations, universities, hospitals, and companies, WHF is urging people to take part in the Keep the Beat challenge: at least 25 minutes of exercise for 25 days in September. The campaign underscores World Health Organisation recommendations of 150 minutes of moderate activity weekly to prevent heart disease and stroke.

Finn-Jarle Rode, CEO of WHF, stressed that low- and middle-income countries face the greatest



burden, calling on governments to introduce National CVD Plans and expand access to treatment, particularly for hypertension.

Alongside awareness activities, WHF has launched a petition on Change.org to push world leaders to commit to reaching 500 million more people with hypertension care by 2030, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The campaign is supported by WHF's 250 members and global partners, including Decathlon, Technogym, Amgen, Servier, Novo Nordisk, Bayer, Arawana, and Standard Foods. The official mascot, Cardi V, will promote heart-healthy habits and call for greater screening and treatment access worldwide.



NEW HOPE FOR TYPE-1 DIABETES

Shifting from insulin dependency to stem cell therapy

SABRINA SUPRITA

Type 1 Diabetes, also known as Juvenile Diabetes, remains a lifelong struggle for many children worldwide. In this autoimmune condition, the body mistakenly destroys the insulin-producing β -cells in the pancreas, starting from early childhood or even before birth. As a result, children with type 1 diabetes must monitor their blood glucose levels at least three times a day and depend on insulin therapy for survival. This lifelong burden not only affects physical health but also takes a serious toll on a child's mental well-being.

Imagine your happy, active child suddenly becoming unusually hungry and rapidly losing weight—even after proper meals. Frequent urination, including bedwetting, may start to occur even after using the toilet before going to bed. These signs are often missed until things get worse—your child begins to breathe heavily, emits a fruity or acetone-like breath, or even collapses during playtime. These are clear signs of high

blood sugar (hyperglycemia). Once diagnosed through tests like glucose tolerance or HbA1c, Type 1 Diabetes confirms the need for lifelong insulin therapy.

According to the International Diabetes Federation Atlas 2013, Bangladesh reported an incidence of 4.2 new cases of type 1 diabetes per 100,000 children (0-14 years), and globally, almost 9.2 million people living with type 1 diabetes were under the age of 20 in the 2024 report. Considering the solution, insulin injections were the only available treatment, with no known cure. But, in recent years, islet cell transplantation has shown some promise, but its success depends on donor availability and requires high doses of immunosuppressive drugs to prevent rejection, posing more challenges than solutions.

But there is new hope!!! Thanks to revolutionary advancements in science, stem cell-based therapy is opening a new pathway to treat type 1 diabetes—by reprogramming the

patient's own stem cells into insulin-producing islet cells!!!

A groundbreaking case from China has changed the narrative. A 25-year-old woman became the first person in the world to be cured of type 1 diabetes after receiving an injection of islet cells derived from her own reprogrammed stem cells. A research team at Peking University in Beijing successfully extracted her stem cells, converted them into insulin-producing islet-like clusters, and transplanted them back into her body. Remarkably, within just 2.5 months, she began producing sufficient insulin naturally—and stayed insulin-independent for over a year.

This milestone brings us one step closer to a future where children no longer have to fear insulin needles for life but can instead look forward to a lasting, biological cure.

The writer is a nutritionist, humanitarian aid worker, and founder of "Level Up with Nutrition", an awareness building social media platform to inspire and educate others. Email: sabrinasuprita@gmail.com

The hidden sugar in our diet: How sweet drinks are harming Bangladesh's health

ABEDA SULTANA

On a hot summer afternoon in Dhaka, a chilled bottle of soft drink or a glass of sweetened iced tea feels like instant relief. But behind the refreshing taste lies a silent threat—too much sugar consumption is quietly triggering a public health crisis in Bangladesh.

Regularly drinking sugary drinks greatly increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other health problems. Sugary drinks are also linked to tooth decay, fatty liver disease, and even certain cancers. For children and teenagers, the risks are even higher. Eating too much sugar early in life can cause health problems that last a lifetime.

In Bangladesh, sweet tea ("cha") is a daily ritual. With the growing popularity of food vlogging, new variations such as malai tea, malta tea, orange tea, and even lassi have become trendy. Young people are drawn to these drinks without considering their health effects. Bottled fruit juices are also widely consumed, often perceived as a healthy choice.

However, many of these so-called "fruit juices" are little more than sugar water with artificial flavouring and contain very little real fruit. Similarly, traditional

drinks served at weddings or during iftar in Ramadan are often loaded with excessive sugar. Changing these habits is not easy—taste preferences, social customs, and lack of awareness all play a role in keeping sugar intake high.

To fight the problem, health experts recommend a combination of education, policy changes, and industry regulation. This includes school awareness campaigns,



encouraging alternatives such as water, unsweetened tea, and fruit-infused water, and clear labelling of sugar content on beverage packaging. Taxes on sugary drinks could also be effective in reducing consumption. Some countries, like Mexico and the UK, have already introduced sugar taxes and seen declines in soft drink consumption. The UK's sugar levy, introduced in 2018, has

proven effective in cutting sugar intake. Even before it came into effect, over half of manufacturers reformulated their drinks to avoid the charge. Between 2015 and 2018, the levy led to a 28.8% reduction in sugar content per 100 ml in affected beverages, according to Public Health England.

Research shows it may have prevented more than 5,000 cases of obesity each year among primary school girls, and fewer children in England have required tooth extractions due to decay since the policy began. Similar measures could work in Bangladesh if combined with strong public awareness campaigns.

While policy changes take time, everyone can start making changes today:

- Choose plain water instead of soft drinks.
- Check labels before buying packaged beverages.
- Limit sweet tea to one or two small cups a day.
- Offer fresh fruit instead of sugary desserts at gatherings.

The sweet taste of sugary drinks comes with a bitter cost to health—it brings long-term health risks. Choosing water today could mean avoiding medicine tomorrow.

The writer is a dietitian. Email: abeda.mishu@gmail.com

7 key nutrients for strong, healthy nails: The ultimate guide

Your nails can be an indicator of your overall health, constantly renewing with the help of nutrients. While many nail-strengthening supplements are marketed, there's insufficient research to back their claims. Biotin, however, is the exception, showing promising results in small studies. It is a B vitamin (B7) that aids protein metabolism and supports nail growth, especially for brittle nails.

To nourish your nails naturally, it's crucial to maintain a balanced diet. These seven nutrients are essential for healthy nails:

Biotin – Known for promoting growth and strength in nails, found in foods like egg yolks, salmon, and

avocado.

B vitamins – B12 and folate support nail health and prevent brittle nails. Rich sources include dairy, leafy greens, and citrus fruits.

Iron – Prevents oxygen shortage to your nails. Iron-rich foods like meat, beans, and spinach are essential.

Magnesium – Vital for protein synthesis, magnesium helps with strong nails and is found in almonds, quinoa, and leafy greens.

Protein – Keratin, a protein in

nails, is built from amino acids. Consuming enough protein from meat, eggs, and legumes helps reinforce nails.

Vitamin C – Important for collagen production and nail strength. Citrus, bell peppers, and tomatoes are great sources.

Zinc – Supports cell growth and nail integrity, found in meat, seeds, and nuts.

While a variety of these nutrients from food can support nail health, biotin supplements may assist in strengthening brittle nails, though a balanced diet is preferred.



BEYOND THE HEARTACHE How grief impacts health

Grief is often thought of as an emotional experience, but its reach goes far deeper—affecting physical health in surprising ways. When someone faces a major loss, the stress can disrupt nearly every system in the body.

One of the first changes people notice is sleep disturbance. Falling asleep may become difficult, nights are restless, or, conversely, some may sleep excessively. Fatigue quickly follows, fuelled by emotional strain and reduced energy. Keeping up with balanced meals, light activity, and social connections can provide much-needed support.

Research shows that prolonged grief weakens the immune system, leaving the body more vulnerable to infections. It is also linked to inflammation, a process tied to conditions like diabetes, arthritis, and heart disease. Stress hormones, especially cortisol, often surge during the grieving period. When levels stay high, they can raise blood pressure and increase cardiovascular risk.

Digestive issues are also common—ranging from nausea and cramps to diarrhoea or constipation. Muscle tension may trigger headaches, back pain, or joint stiffness. Even the heart itself can be affected: intense grief has been associated with rapid heartbeat, higher chances of heart attack, and in rare cases, "broken heart syndrome", a condition that mimics a heart attack but usually resolves within weeks.

While some of these effects ease with time, ongoing symptoms should not be ignored. Talking with a doctor, counsellor, or support group can help individuals navigate both the emotional and physical consequences of loss, fostering healing on every level.



Menstrual dignity through markets: A safe path for underserved women

The Daily Star (TDS): How has Safepad's innovation in reusable menstrual hygiene products improved health and dignity for women in remote and marginalised communities?

Tahmid K. Chowdhury (TKC): We have developed two main product verticals. The first is our reusable pads, designed for women from all walks of life. Each Safepad is embedded with antimicrobial technology that eliminates harmful bacteria and fungi, helping women enjoy an infection-free period with confidence.

The second is our ocean plastic upcycled range, which turns recovered plastic waste into safe, comfortable menstrual products. Beyond standard pads, we have reusable post-partum pads for new mothers, labia pads for specialised needs, and breast pads to support breastfeeding women. Some of these are yet to be introduced in Bangladesh but they are part of our broader vision: ensuring no woman has to choose between her health, her dignity, and the planet's wellbeing.

TDS: What strategies have been most effective in reaching hard-to-access markets, and how do you adapt these approaches across regions?

TKC: Our delivery strategy relies on a network of partners to ensure Safepad reaches every doorstep within 72 hours. We also adapt outreach by working closely with local women entrepreneurs, community health workers, and schools.

In flood-prone areas, our teams use boats to navigate waterways, while in more conservative regions we create safe, women-only spaces to encourage open dialogue.

TDS: What role does feedback from users play in shaping product design and delivery models?

particularly regarding comfort, affordability, and trust?

TKC: Women have guided us on what works and what does not, and we have adapted accordingly.

For example, we now offer two SKUs: a regular pack with four pads and an economy pack with two. The economy pack was introduced on popular demand,



enabling users to try Safepad at a lower price before committing to a larger purchase.

Based on feedback, we integrated a black biodegradable zipper bag to store pads. Durable and water-resistant, it protects the pads even if paper packets wear out from splashes while showering or handling. Many users also requested payment flexibility, which we incorporated into our sales models.

TDS: How has iDE's support influenced your ability to scale operations and build awareness around menstrual hygiene and reproductive health?

TKC: iDE connected us with new partners, expanded our reach into untapped regions, and provided platforms for large-scale awareness campaigns in schools and communities. Their market-based approach aligned with ours.

Instead of distributing products

for free, we worked together to create sustainable distribution channels that empower women to earn an income while addressing a critical health need.

TDS: What future collaborations or innovations are you exploring to deepen your social impact and reach new segments?

TKC: We are working to integrate menstrual health education more deeply into schools so access to products goes hand in hand with knowledge and confidence.

Tahmid K. Chowdhury
CEO
Safepad Bangladesh

Expanding into climate-vulnerable areas is also a priority, as supply chain disruptions there can leave women without essentials. On the innovation side, we are developing pads that are lighter, faster drying, and more affordable, while continuing to expand our reusable product categories for different life stages. Our goal is to make responsible consumption the norm, ensuring menstrual products do not add to the mountain of waste we are already battling.

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.