

DON'T MISS A BEAT

START SAVING YOUR HEART TODAY

Today is World Heart Day, a global reminder of the urgent need to fight cardiovascular disease (CVD), the world's leading cause of death. Every year, over 6.5 million people die prematurely from heart disease, and 75% of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. In Bangladesh, the situation is even more alarming; on average, a person suffers a first heart attack nine years earlier than someone in the West.

WHY IT MATTERS

Globally, one in three heart attacks occurs in people under 70. In just the last decade, heart disease has doubled, overtaking cancer in long-term mortality and morbidity. Conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes are often silent but deadly. This is quietly fueling this crisis. Shockingly, only one in five people with hypertension is aware and

Miss a Beat," calls us to act:

1. As individuals, we can make heart-smart lifestyle choices.
2. As governments, by ensuring equitable access and policy support.
3. As a global community, by demanding action at the UN's High-Level Meeting this year to prioritise CVD.

WHAT CAUSES HEART ATTACKS?

The most common and devastating form of heart disease is a heart attack (myocardial infarction). It occurs when fatty deposits (atherosclerosis) block an artery, cutting off oxygen and killing heart cells.

KEY RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

- Diabetes – poorly controlled blood sugar accelerates artery blockage.
- High blood pressure – damages artery walls



PROF. DR. MOEEN UDDIN AHMED

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controlled through treatment. Raising that to even one in two could prevent 130 million early deaths.

The good news? Up to 80% of these deaths are preventable through healthy choices, early screening, and better access to healthcare.

This year's World Heart Day theme, “Don't

and speeds up plaque buildup.

•High cholesterol – excess LDL (“bad” cholesterol) and triglycerides raise risk, while HDL (“good” cholesterol) protects the heart.

•Obesity – linked to high blood pressure, diabetes, and abnormal cholesterol.

•Sedentary lifestyle – lack of activity worsens

weight, sugar, and fat control.

•Family history – early heart disease in close relatives increases risk.

•Metabolic syndrome – a dangerous mix of a large waistline, high blood sugar, low HDL, high triglycerides, and borderline high blood pressure.

•Stress and substance abuse – chronic mental strain and recreational drugs can trigger heart attacks.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR HEART

Prevention is simple but powerful. Small daily changes add up to long-term protection.

1. Eat smart – Choose fresh, unprocessed foods, five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, whole grains, nuts, and meals low in sugar, salt, and saturated fats.

2. Stay active – Aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least five days a week. Take the stairs, walk short distances, and move more throughout your day.

3. Maintain healthy weight – Keep your BMI at 24 or below and avoid central obesity.

4. Quit tobacco and alcohol – Even second-

hand smoke is dangerous. The risk of heart disease halves within a year of quitting. Ideally, avoid alcohol altogether.

5. Manage stress – Chronic stress harms the heart, especially in women. Exercise, relaxation techniques, and leisure help.

6. Know your numbers – Track blood pressure, sugar, cholesterol, BMI, and waist-to-hip ratio. Awareness is the first step to prevention.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Heart disease is not inevitable. In fact, it is preventable. By adopting healthier habits and staying vigilant through regular screenings, we can save millions of lives.

Your heart is your life's rhythm. Don't miss a beat. Start protecting it today.

The writer is Prof. Dr. Moeen Uddin Ahmed, MBBS, MD (Cardiology), Senior Consultant in Clinical & Interventional Cardiology at Unico Hospitals PLC.

World's No.1 Silent Killer



PROFESSOR KHONDKAR ABDUL AWAL (RIZVI)

President, National Heart Foundation of Bangladesh

“Adopt a healthy lifestyle, manage stress, and protect your environment because your heart health depends on it.”



PROFESSOR FAROOQUE AHMED

Chief Consultant Cardiac Surgeon
National Heart Foundation Hospital & Research Institute

“Prevention is better than cure. Avoid unhealthy habits before they place you on the operating table.”

On World Heart Day, Bangladesh's health leaders are spotlighting the urgent need for awareness about cardiovascular disease (CVD), the country's most critical health challenge. The Daily Star sat with the doctors to discuss the importance of prevention versus cure.



PROFESSOR FAZILA TUN-NESE MALIK

Chief Consultant Cardiologist
National Heart Foundation Hospital & Research Institute

“You've got only one heart, take care of it.”



PROFESSOR TAWFIQ SHAHRIAR HUQ

Senior Consultant Cardiologist
National Heart Foundation Hospital & Research Institute

“Never ignore symptoms like fatigue, palpitations, or breathlessness. Consult a doctor, not friends or neighbors.”

Professor Khondkar Abdul Awal (Rizvi), President of the National Heart Foundation of Bangladesh, emphasizes the importance of the day. He reminds us that heart disease and stroke remain the world's leading killers, claiming 20 million lives globally each year, with nearly 200,000 deaths in Bangladesh alone.

“Non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease, and cancer now account for 70% of all deaths in Bangladesh,” he explains. “But there is a silver lining; most heart conditions are preventable.”

Prevention rests on several key pillars: eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, avoiding tobacco and alcohol, managing stress, and maintaining a clean environment.

At the same time, he highlights systemic challenges. Bangladesh spends only 1% of its GDP on healthcare, among the lowest in the

region. Even these limited funds are often underutilized.

With 70% of healthcare delivered by the private sector, he calls for the establishment of a national health insurance system to protect citizens from catastrophic medical costs.

This year's global theme, “Don't miss a beat,” stresses the need for vigilance at every stage of heart health.

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO NATIONAL PROGRESS

Looking back at the country's medical journey, Professor Dr. Farooque Ahmed, Chief Consultant Cardiac Surgeon, recalls how limited resources once were. “In 1981, on average, about 160 to 180 heart surgeries were performed annually in Bangladesh,” he says. “Last year, the number surpassed 18,500.”

Despite this impressive growth, the demand is still unmet. At least 25,000 surgeries are required each year to serve Bangladesh's population adequately.

WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE

Professor Dr. Fazila Tun-Nesa Malik, Chief Consultant Cardiologist, challenges the misconception that heart disease is primarily a “man's disease.” She emphasises that women face unique risks, particularly after menopause.

“Before menopause, estrogen protects women by maintaining healthier cholesterol levels, glucose metabolism, and arterial flexibility,” she explains. “After menopause, estrogen levels drop, and women's risk of cardiovascular disease rises sharply, becoming equal to men's.”

Another challenge is that women often experience atypical symptoms of heart disease, like fatigue, palpitations, or shortness of breath, rather than the classic chest pain. This leads to delayed diagnosis and treatment. Pregnancy-related heart complications add further risk.

Dr. Malik describes a heart attack as a sudden blockage in a heart artery caused by a blood clot. “The priority is to restore blood flow as quickly as possible,” she stresses. In Bangladesh, where specialised facilities may be limited, she advocates for a ‘pharmacoinvasive strategy’ giving clot-busting medication immediately at the nearest clinic before transferring the patient to a cardiac center.

NEW FRONTIERS AND UNSEEN CHALLENGES

Dr. Tawfiq Shahriar Huq, Senior Consultant

Cardiologist, draws attention to two under-discussed but urgent issues.

The first is the growing incidence of heart disease among young Bangladeshi migrant workers. “These men and women often endure physically strenuous labour, poor diets, and intense stress from family separation,” he explains. “Most have no access to healthcare abroad, and their visas rarely cover health insurance.”

The second issue is congenital heart disease in children. Dr. Huq reveals that an estimated 300,000 Bangladeshi children are born with heart defects each year. Due to a lack of awareness and the limited availability of specialised pediatric cardiac care, many of these cases end in preventable deaths.



Don't Miss a Beat.
Act Now. It Could Save Your Life.

Beat Hypertension
Live Longer

Tems A
Telmisartan & Amlodipine Tablet

ARNIS
Sacubitril & Valsartan Tablet

•Prescription only medicine