

Neurological conditions are the leading cause of ill health and disability

The World Health Organisation (WHO) warned that fewer than one in three countries had a national policy to address the rising burden of neurological disorders, which caused over 11 million deaths globally each year. According to WHO's Global Status Report on Neurology, neurological conditions affected more than 40% of the world's population—over 3 billion people. The leading causes of death and disability in 2021 included stroke, neonatal encephalopathy, migraine, Alzheimer's disease, diabetic neuropathy, meningitis, epilepsy, preterm birth complications, autism spectrum disorders, and nervous system cancers.

Low-income countries had over 80 times fewer neurologists than high-income nations, leaving many patients without care. Only 32% of WHO Member States had national policies for neurological disorders, and just 18% had dedicated funding. Essential services such as stroke units, rehabilitation, and palliative care were often unavailable, especially in rural and underserved areas. Furthermore, only 25% of countries included neurological disorders in their universal health coverage packages.

The report also revealed that few countries supported carers—only 46 offered carer services, and 44 had legal protections. Most carers, often women, remained unrecognised and financially burdened. Weak data systems and underfunded research further hindered progress.

In response, WHO Member States had adopted the Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Disorders in 2022 to guide countries in improving care, policy, and prevention. WHO urged governments to prioritise brain health, expand access to care, promote prevention across life stages, and strengthen data systems for evidence-based decision-making.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION



How to deal with Diabetic Foot?

DR K K PANDEY

Nowadays you must be hearing the word "Diabetic Foot" from people around. You must have also come to know that your friend's relative or acquaintance had a "Diabetic Foot" and a lot of treatment was done but in the end, the toe or the front part of the foot had to be amputated. After hearing the name "Diabetic Foot" repeatedly, your curiosity must have increased as to what does it mean?

What is the meaning of "Diabetic Foot"?
Severe pain, tingling, or a burning sensation in the feet can be early signs of Diabetic Foot, a serious complication of diabetes. If blisters appear or a wound caused by a minor injury fails to heal despite antibiotics and dressings, it indicates the condition is worsening. When the toes start turning dark or black, it suggests severe tissue damage. In the most advanced stage, known as Charcot Foot, the foot's shape changes, pain may lessen, and deformities such as bunions, corns, or red pressure marks appear—signs that the bones and joints in the foot have become severely damaged.

What to do if you have "Diabetic Foot"?

If you are a victim of "Diabetic Foot", then without wasting time consult an experienced vascular surgeon and

get treatment under his supervision. Some important tests are required. Such as X-ray of the foot, Doppler test and CT Angiography. "Diabetic Foot Scan" has to be done to check neuropathy, and identification of pressure areas on soles. The correct treatment is determined on the basis of the results of all these tests. So always go to such hospitals where along with the 24-hour availability of a vascular surgeon, there is also facility of all these special tests.

What is the treatment modality in a "Diabetic Foot"?

If a diabetic patient has a wound or a smelly infection on his foot, then first of all the pus and infection have to be cleaned through surgery to prevent the infection from further spreading. Special medicines are given to control the infection. At the same time, angiography of the foot is done to check the present status of blood flow in the leg and foot. If there is a blockage in the blood pipe of the foot, then angioplasty and stenting are done to increase the blood flow in the foot as this will help in healing the wound. Often, the help of a special type of dressing

(VAC dressing) is taken. Sometimes skin grafting is done to heal the wound quickly. An attempt is made to save the foot or toes from being amputated.

Prevention is more important than treatment of "Diabetic Foot"

Every diabetic patient must try his best not to become a victim of "diabetic foot". That is why its prevention is more important than its treatment. Always avoid wearing chappals, sandals and slippers, either at home or outside. Always use cotton socks and soft shoes during day time.

Never wear shoes without socks. Never walk barefooted either inside the home or on the grass in the park. Take a walk of 5 to 6 kilo meters daily. Do not increase your weight at all. Keep your blood sugar under control. Remember that uncontrolled sugar level in the blood plays an important role in causing "diabetic foot".

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feel painful. This explains why some people experience cramps, nausea, or irregular bowel movements during tense periods.

To address this growing concern, healthcare must take a more integrated approach. Doctors and nutritionists should routinely assess stress levels when treating gastric complaints. Psychological therapies, such as mindfulness, yoga, and cognitive-behavioural therapy, have been proven to reduce symptoms of IBS and dyspepsia. Balanced diets rich in fibre, probiotics, and lean proteins, alongside lifestyle changes like regular meals and reduced caffeine, can further restore digestive health.

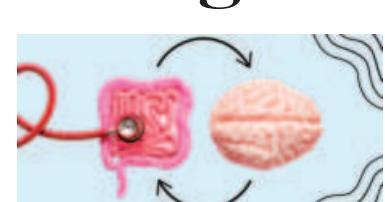
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The hidden connection between the mind and gastric health

RAISA MEHZABEEN

In today's fast-paced world, stress has become an inseparable part of modern life. Deadlines, financial pressures, and social expectations silently strain both mind and body. While stress is often perceived as a purely mental burden, it leaves visible marks on physical health, especially the stomach. Bloating, acid reflux, indigestion, and irritable bowel symptoms are increasingly being recognised as manifestations of chronic psychological stress.

At the heart of this connection lies the gut-brain axis, a two-way communication system linking the brain, gut, and their vast networks of neurones, hormones, and microbes. The gut, often called the "second brain", contains about 100 million neurones. When stress activates the



hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, hormones like cortisol and adrenaline surge, disturbing digestion, gut motility, and even the balance of beneficial bacteria. As a result, mental stress can literally upset the stomach.

Physiologically, stress disrupts normal digestive rhythms. Elevated cortisol slows stomach emptying, while adrenaline diverts blood flow from the gut to vital organs, impairing digestion and absorption. Stress also increases gut sensitivity, making ordinary digestive processes

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN ACTION

Empowering lives through meaningful participation

LAIZU AKTER

It was a sunny morning in Dhaka when little Rafiq, a seven-year-old boy with cerebral palsy, smiled for the first time while learning to hold a pencil on his own. For weeks, an occupational therapist had been guiding his mother on how to help him practice hand movements through play-based exercises using common household objects. That one moment—a small hand holding a pencil—was more than a skill gained; it was a symbol of independence, confidence, and dignity.

Stories like Rafiq's unfold quietly every day in therapy centres, hospitals, and homes across Bangladesh. This is the heart of occupational therapy in action—helping people of all ages engage in the activities that give life

participation, and everyday living.

Across the country, occupational therapists are quietly contributing to community-based rehabilitation, special education, mental health services, and elderly care. Their interventions promote productivity, reduce long-term dependency, and enhance quality of life—aligning perfectly with national

universities can host open sessions or community demonstrations showing how daily activities can be adapted to individual needs.

Engage policymakers and media: Advocate for inclusion of occupational therapy in mainstream healthcare systems and national development planning.

Spread the message online: Use



goals of inclusion and sustainable development.

To truly empower people with disabilities and support recovery after illness or injury, Bangladesh needs greater investment in occupational therapy education, policy recognition, and service expansion.

HOW WE CAN CELEBRATE AND SUPPORT THE CAUSE

Share stories of change: Highlight people whose lives have been touched by occupational therapy—children who can now write, workers who return to their jobs, elders who regain independence.

Organise public awareness events: Clinics, hospitals, and

social media to promote this year's theme—"Occupational Therapy in Action"—and emphasise that participation is a human right.

As Bangladesh embraces the spirit of Occupational Therapy in Action, let us support the growth of this vital profession. Let us recognise the quiet heroes—the occupational therapists—who work every day to bring dignity, participation, and hope into people's lives.

Because when participation happens, life happens.

The writer is a 4th Year student of BSc in Occupational Therapy, at Saic College of Medical Science & Technology (SCMST).

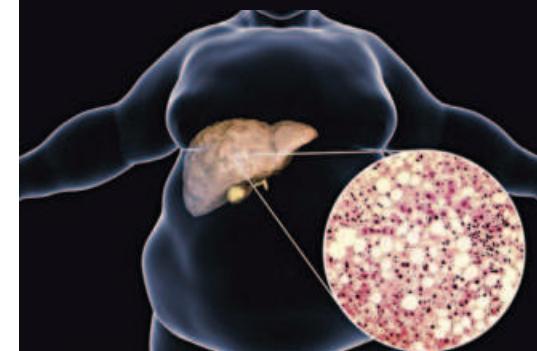
At-home workouts to keep your liver healthy

You don't need a gym to take care of your liver—simple exercises at home can make a big difference. Regular physical activity helps reduce liver fat, improves metabolism, and prevents fatty liver disease from progressing. Experts recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week, which can be easily achieved through everyday movements.

A great way to start is with 30 minutes of brisk walking or marching in place five times a week. Adding strength training two or three times weekly also helps the liver function better. You can do squats, lunges, or wall push-ups to strengthen your muscles without needing equipment. Simple core exercises like planks or leg raises can further improve overall fitness.

These workouts not only support liver health but also boost energy and control weight—two key factors for preventing fatty liver disease. Alongside exercise, adopting healthy habits is equally important. Choose whole grains, vegetables, and lean proteins, while cutting down on sugar, processed foods, and alcohol.

The key is consistency. Regular movement and a balanced diet can gradually lower liver fat and reduce the risk of inflammation or liver damage. If you have any health concerns or are new to exercise, it is always better to consult a doctor before starting. With small, steady steps, you can protect your liver and improve your overall well-being from the comfort of your home.



Building markets that last: Rethinking development partnership

The Daily Star (TDS): How can development projects create sustainable impact rather than temporary fixes?

Mohammed Soeb Iftekhar (MSI): In Bangladesh, while emergency funding and direct delivery mechanisms play a critical role in addressing immediate needs, many interventions are not structured to ensure lasting impact. As a result, progress can slow once external funding concludes. To enhance sustainability, there is an opportunity to transition from a direct implementation approach to a facilitative one, embedding solutions within local markets, private sector systems, and community institutions for longer-term resilience.

For example, promoting a nutritious crop like orange-fleshed sweet potato can only succeed if farmers have a reliable market to sell to. Therefore, our first step is to validate the market concept by linking farmers with buyers and processors, to ensure production is profitable before scaling. Establishing proof of concept prior to wider promotion helps prevent unintended consequences. Similarly, we move beyond simply installing water pumps. Instead, we explore opportunities to develop networks of local retailers and service providers who integrate these products into their business models. Our role is to catalyse and strengthen market relationships, then gradually step back, leaving behind a self-sustaining system in which each actor has both the capacity and the incentive to continue the activity.

TDS: What practical tools does iDE use to create system change in sectors like renewable energy, agricultural machinery, and WASH?

MSI: While consumers can readily access financing for high-value consumer goods, low-income farmers often lack affordable financing options for productive assets such as solar irrigation pumps. This gap highlights the need for market mechanisms that make essential technologies and services more accessible and sustainable. To address these challenges, iDE applies practical tools that de-risk innovation for the private sector and design commercially viable business models that can scale and sustain impact over time.

For instance, through piloting and partnership models, we have facilitated the emergence of a million-dollar agro-machinery market by engaging both government and private actors. Using the business model canvas, we map every component of a business, from value proposition to customer segments and revenue streams, to ensure commercial viability before expansion.

In WASH, we apply facilitation tools that go beyond building infrastructure. We work to align the incentives of local masons, material suppliers, water service providers, and local governments,



employment. Our approach applies a skills graduation model, a structured pathway that enables individuals to progress from subsistence to sustainable enterprise. This begins with a human-centred design and business model canvas analysis to identify viable opportunities. Participants then receive tailored business capacity-building support through four modules: business analysis, technical knowledge, sales and marketing, and business linkages.

Gender inclusion is integrated at every stage, from project design through implementation, using a gender-lens analysis to address barriers women face in accessing finance, information, and markets. Rather than creating isolated

Mohammed Soeb Iftekhar

Director of Programs, iDE Bangladesh

women's groups, we connect women entrepreneurs to the broader market ecosystem as confident, capable, and competitive business leaders.

TDS: What role can local governments and private investors play after donor exit?

MSI: They serve as the twin pillars of long-term sustainability. Local governments create the enabling environment by supporting local enterprises, allocating market spaces, and embedding successful models into broader development initiatives. Private investors, in turn, drive scale, transforming successful donor-funded pilots into commercially viable and financially independent enterprises.

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.

This content has been published under 'Catalyzing Markets' - a media campaign jointly initiated by iDE Bangladesh and The Daily Star. This interview was conducted by Shams Rashid Tonmoy.