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Femme Forward

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Why your 40s don't have to mean struggles – perimenopause explained

The forties may have gained a reputation for being the age when bad things happen to a woman's body, but there is no magic to this number. Every woman goes through these physiological changes in their own time. The 40s is, however, the age when perimenopause is most likely to hit women, and it is good to know what changes to expect and how to combat them.



Perimenopause can be loosely defined as the prep time that a female body takes to transition into menopause, and it is here that hormones such as oestrogen and progesterone start to destabilise. The most notable changes a woman faces physically at this time are weight gain, a deteriorating skin texture, and exhaustion. Doctors have noted that this particular weight gain is not just visible on the scale — it settles distinctly on the hips, giving the body a more rotund look.

The loss of oestrogen and progesterone is directly responsible for saggy and more dehydrated skin, fine lines and the loss of skin suppleness due to decreasing collagen.

Dr Kazi Azmiri Hoque, RMO at the Obs Gyn Department of Meditech General Hospital, mentions, "Women can sometimes lose the softness of their face, and even the litheness of their build during this process, and gain some facial hair."

Women hitting this age also often complain of losing hair volume, but this is not common to everyone.

One of the most important jobs of oestrogen is to keep young joints greased — women losing this hormone in their 40s, therefore, often complain of joint stiffness, bone and back pain over time, especially if they have a BMI on the higher side.

Women also lose muscle mass and strength by up to 15 per cent during this time, increasing the risk of fractures and osteoporosis. Other effects of hitting premenopause include vision changes and dry eyes, a weak pelvic floor, especially for women who have given birth, sleep



challenges, fatigue and consequent brain fog.

These, however, are only the tip of the proverbial iceberg of perimenopause. Oestrogen provides a buffer against cardiovascular ageing and even insulin sensitivity. A decrease in the hormone could therefore render women more vulnerable to cardiovascular risks and strokes, and increase the risks of Type 2 diabetes.

Wild fluctuations of hormones before the last period may cause irregular periods, hot flashes and night sweats, vaginal dryness, and wild mood swings in women.

"One of the reasons women dread menopause is because they feel that this would mean the end of sexual desire and physical love, but this is far from the truth," shares Azmiri. "In fact, libido remains unchanged and sexual relations can continue well into menopause."

Vaginal dryness may be an issue

during this time, but lubricants can help make things better. While these are all intimidating factors to consider, not every woman goes through all these factors, and definitely not all at once.

"Oftentimes, women find themselves dealing with teenage children in their 40s, or ailing parents," confides Azmiri. "These are stressors which may manifest themselves in the form of aches and pains. Most doctors group these ailments under menopause, making it a villainous stage in women's lives."

However, there are several ways in which a woman can combat the negative effects of perimenopause in her 40s. She can choose to switch to a healthy lifestyle, incorporating a balanced diet, for instance.

A dietician will be especially beneficial here, as they can chalk out a phytoestrogen-rich diet including foods like flaxseeds, soy, and lentils, balance blood sugar levels, and order a reduction in nicotine, caffeine, and alcoholic beverages.

Women can also take up regular exercise, leaving behind a sedentary way of life, and practice stress management techniques such as yoga or meditation. A good sleep hygiene, such as a solid eight-hour shut-eye and a no-screens rule an hour before bedtime, can help counter fatigue and brain fog.

More than anything else, having a good sense of awareness of what is going on in your body means that half the battle is already won. Knowing and expecting, and to some extent perhaps even combating the signs of perimenopause, can make your 40s much less daunting, allowing you to embrace this milestone age as a special number, not a dreaded one.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Collected

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Biting into Bogura's history: The story of Lal Miya and kotkoti

If you ever visit Mahasthangarh in Mahasthan, Bogura, you will pass through the area of Shah Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar Mazar. The moment you arrive at the gate; your eyes will catch rows of shops selling one special treat that instantly draws attention: kotkoti! Among all these shops, you will instantly recognise the pioneer, one that witnessed Mahasthan's rise to a tourist hotspot: Lal Miya Kotkoti Ghar.

Behind the counter of this famous shop sits a man whose story is carved into the history of this place, Lal Miya, still reigning over it at more than 90 years old. When we met him, he smiled softly and invited us to sit and listen to his life story, a tale that began more than a century ago.

Lal Miya's grandfather, Jahar Mahmud, was the first to start selling sweets near the mazar gate.

Back then, there were no crowds, no bustling market, only open land and the fear of wild animals.

"In those days," Lal Miya shares, "there were tigers that roamed around here freely."

Jahar Mahmud used to sell simple sweets like khagrai and batasha inside a small straw hut he built, a nameless little shop. Visitors to the mazar would often buy a little amount of sweets as 'shinni,' a traditional offering distributed at the conclusion of religious gatherings.

After his death, his son Mohammad Ali took over the family trade. Business

was slow, and survival was a challenge. To revive it, he decided to try something new. Alongside khagrai and batasha, he experimented with flour and jaggery, frying the mixture in mustard oil to create a hard, crunchy sweet that made a sound when bitten. And thus, "kotkoti" was born. Over time, both the process and the taste evolved, yet the business continued to face difficulties.

It was around 1940 when Lal Miya, Mohammad Ali's son, took over the family business. Mahasthan was still quiet and undeveloped.

"There were only a few shops here then when I started," he explains.

Lal Miya brought changes to the recipe, and it was an instant hit. He replaced wheat flour with rice flour, and instead of mustard oil, he began using palm and soybean oil. He even added a mix of spices to make the flavour richer. The results were immediate — kotkoti became tastier and more popular than ever before.

By the 1980s, Lal Miya replaced the old straw hut with a tin-roofed shop and put up a signboard that said "Lal Miya Kotkoti Ghar."

Business started to flourish, and soon, workers and local vendors began learning from him, setting up their own small shops nearby. Thus, Mahasthan gradually turned into a kotkoti hub, where dozens of families make their living from this simple, crunchy sweet now.

While talking to Lal Miya, we also met his sons and grandsons, who now look after the shop. Interestingly, every few minutes, customers came in, and before anyone bought anything, they were first offered a few pieces to taste. Curious, we asked one of the sons why they did this. He smiled and said, "Feeding someone is 'ibadah' — a pious act. This is what our father and grandfather taught us. You may or may not buy from our shop; it doesn't matter. If you come to our shop, you will taste free kotkotis, whoever you are."

And in that moment, we instantly realised that it was this simple, generous spirit that made Lal Miya's kotkoti truly special.

We were offered some as well. The warm kotkotis were coated with jaggery but not overly sweet, carrying the rich aroma

of ghee with subtle hints of black cumin and bay leaves. Each bite was satisfyingly crunchy, releasing the nutty, caramelised flavours of the fried dough.

Today, Mahasthan is a busy place. Every Friday, hundreds of visitors walk through the ancient ruins of Mahasthangarh, and almost every one of them stops by the kotkoti shops before heading home.

"On Fridays, we sell around 20-25 maunds," Lal Miya shares. "And, on weekdays, maybe 10-12 maunds, and that's fine too."

There are five types of kotkoti now at Lal Miya's shop: fried in oil, dalda, ghee, premium ghee, and shahi. They differ in ingredients: the shahi variety, for example, is enriched with assorted nuts. Prices range from Tk 160 to Tk 300 per kilogram.

The popularity of kotkoti has grown far beyond Bogura. Visitors take it home as gifts, and some even send it abroad. Over the years, other shops have risen, each adding its own flavour to the tradition. But for most locals, the name Lal Miya's kotkoti still carries a nostalgic weight, the taste of time itself.

"I am old now," Lal Miya expresses, "but when I see my sons continue to serve the people, it brings a warmth to my heart I cannot describe."

By Jawwad Sami Neogi
Photo: Jawwad Sami Neogi



ELEGANTLY INTELLIGENT

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ARE WE LOOKING FOR LUXURY in all the wrong places?

Luxury — the golden buzzword with endless possibilities and promises. Which begets the question, what is luxury to you? Living in a fancy apartment, driving a prestige car? Perhaps, carrying designer handbags?

Sure, these are markers of a luxurious lifestyle by all means. An enhanced way of living with every imaginable perk is definitely desirable for us all. But in a post-COVID world, is that all there is to a life of luxury? Surely not. When being able to breathe freely without fear of death looming ominously became our reality, then came a shift in our perspective.

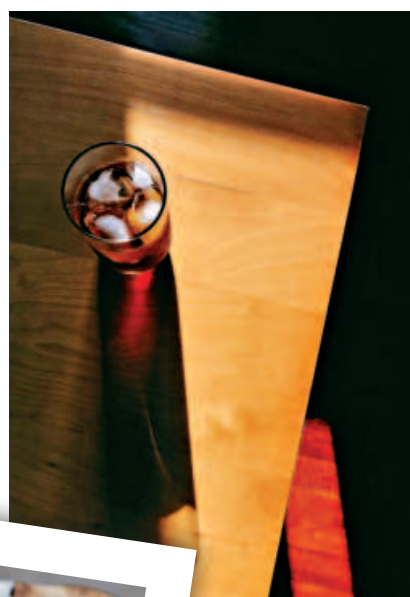
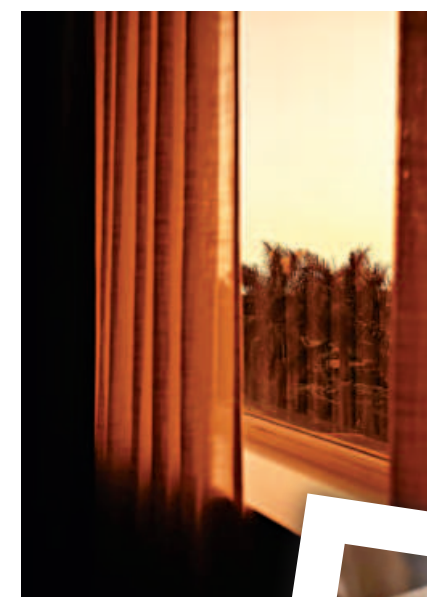
Traditional ideas of opulence and extravagance are hardly considered luxurious anymore; evolved individuals now focus on a more holistic approach that includes tailor-made, personal experiences, sustainability, social and spiritual growth. Real luxury is so much more than just possessions, so let me elaborate!

A slow morning that does not begin with the jarring sound of an alarm; you wake up at your own pace, slowly and steadily, and you let the soft rays of the morning sun kiss your face.

Brewing your coffee in your French press, you look out the window, content and calm as the sprawling greenery and foliage outside soothe your mind. And then you leisurely plan your day while sipping your coffee with no deadlines looming over your head.

Sounds like a luxury, right? Because it is!

Experts argue that after all is said and done, real status and power hide behind the veneer of perceived luxury. In other words, freedom and control over one's life, peace and security, being anxiety-free, is a real luxury in today's world. The ultimate sign of freedom is being totally secure in one's own skin and not having to cover one's person with expensive goods to



appear wealthy.

For those in the know, being disconnected, savouring trivial matters, and just being present in the moment defines true luxury. A recent survey showed that in Silicon Valley, the very inventors who invent and develop cutting-edge, latest technologies do not welcome said innovations in their own homes and personal spaces.

Their children are not exposed to gadgets or social media at all. Instead, they are raised in an old-fashioned way through human interaction, connection, and communication.

Sounds like an oxymoron, right? That survey also found that these guys are

heavily invested in prioritising family life, often sharing parental roles with their spouses, the majority of whom are stay-at-home mothers.

Raising children, fostering family relationships, and building 'villages' or communities that act as emotional safety nets, are considered to be the rare, real privilege of the wealthy.

It is in sharp contrast to the stressful lives of the masses, juggling multiple jobs and struggling to make ends meet.

So, yes! School runs, being able to help with your child's school projects, cooking a meal together without having to worry about making ends meet, is a real luxury not afforded to many.

How many times have you taken a

home-cooked meal for granted? Prepared with intention, with organic ingredients sourced with care, it is a luxury not many have. Sounds trivial? It is anything but!

A healthy diet leads to a healthy body, sound mind, and overall health countenance that, in turn, ensures one is thriving. So, the age-old adage 'health is wealth' stands true, regardless of being a cliché.

Families struggling to make ends meet tend to have poor eating habits, which, in turn, affects their lives in more ways than one. Unhealthy food habits lead to diseases which require more funding to survive, causing money to drain. It is a vicious cycle that is tough to break. Hence, if you're fortunate enough to have healthy, home-cooked meals, it is indeed a luxury!

And lastly, among other things, are relationships. We tend to take some for granted, others we work for, so on and so forth. One might be wondering why this is even relevant, but the fact of the matter is that being surrounded by a bunch of individuals who truly care about you and are there for you is perhaps the greatest luxury of all.

Allow me to explain. People who are in your closest circle are those with whom you can be yourself, without any fear of judgment. They laugh with you and cry too. Their presence feels like a warm embrace that will catch you should you ever fall. In that regard, trust and respect follow closely. These individuals are trustworthy and love you unconditionally, which makes them invaluable, and hence, a real luxury.

So, my dearest gentle readers, look around you, take a deep breath and embrace the simple but meaningful luxuries that you are blessed with!

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
Photo: Collected

#FYI

Your brain prioritises criticism over praise — Here's why



Imagine this: you've received a dozen compliments in one day, but a single offhand insult leaves you brooding. Interestingly, research shows that this is not oversensitivity, but rather a biological phenomenon. Our brains are hardwired to give more attention and emotional weight to negative experiences than positive

ones. This phenomenon is known as "negativity bias", a deeply ingrained survival mechanism.

A 2021 neuroscience review confirmed this: negative stimuli produce stronger brain activity than equally intense positive stimuli, underscoring the depth of the negativity bias.

In ancestral environments where

threats were immediate and survival depended on detecting danger quickly, this bias made sense. Today, threats are rarely predators but missed deadlines, network failures, or social slights. Yet, our brain still treats negative signals as high-priority alarms and then seldom turns them off!

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#FASHION & BEAUTY

Black *and* Red

Power play in fashion

Few colour pairings command attention the way black and red do. Together, they form perhaps the most enduring love story of fashion. Black

has always embodied sophistication, while red has been unapologetically bold. In Bangladesh's fashion scene, where colour and texture

often tell stories of culture with a blend of modernity, this duo continues to stand apart. From monochrome co-ords to geometric patterns with crimson accents and

jet-black sarees worn with ruby lips, the pairing is everywhere every season.



Photo: Salek Bin Taher

Model: Efa, Torsha

Wardrobe: Sozpodor by Tenzing

Styling: Tenzing Chakma

Makeup: Badhon

#FASHION & BEAUTY

What makes **BLACK** *and* **RED** the boldest fashion duo?



Star
LIFE Style



THE ALLURE OF THE CONTRAST

Black and red are not quite considered colours as much as they are seen as a mood. Black offers structure, mystery and depth, while red brings warmth, vibrancy and emotion. In the visual language of fashion, black anchors and red disrupts — it's the perfect match.

From boutiques to everyday wardrobes, black and red continue to define versatility. They bridge casual and formal, day and night, tradition and fashion. A black linen kurta with red detailing works just as beautifully for a brunch as it does for a dinner. A flowing red skirt paired with a fitted black blouse feels both festive and bold. We know it already; you can wear black and red a hundred different ways, and never go wrong with it. The beauty lies in how personal it becomes.

In today's lifestyle, where ease and adaptability in style are most valued, this duo fits seamlessly. It's minimal, flattering on all tones, and always delivers that touch of quiet drama.

STATEMENT IN SIMPLICITY

Outfits shine brightest when styled with intention. A black outfit, in its purity, acts as a blank canvas, ready to be decorated with a single accent. Red steps in, not to overwhelm, but to define. Think of a red bedazzled clutch with a black sari. A red manicure catches light against a black silk cuff. A crimson lip transforms a simple monochrome kurta into a head-turning look. It's proof that you don't need excess to make an impression — only the right contrast.

THE TIMELESS EVENING PALETTE

For evening wear, nothing feels quite as complete as the balance of these two tones. The combination has reigned for

decades because it never feels dated. While we have seen a time where red and black were only labelled bold, today's interpretations are softer and more fluid: sheer dupattas edged in red, layered two pieces in deep maroon and black, minimalist silhouettes that whisper more than they shout.

A full red look grounded with black accessories is elegant and sensual; a black ensemble with red accents is powerful and poised. Either way, the effect is the same — an undeniable presence. At its core, the black-red combination is more than a representation of balance that is offered rarely in other combinations.

It's no wonder the combination continues to dominate editorials, runways, and wardrobes alike. The pairing has a universality that transcends trends — wearable in every season, on every skin tone, and across every occasion.

So, the next time you are choosing between something bold or something safe, remember that you don't have to. Slip into black, add a hint of red — a scarf, a pair of heels, a bag, a lip colour, or even a dozen red bangles? And you will find that balance between restraint and rebellion, tradition and now.

By Nusrath Jahan

Photo: Salek Bin Taher

Model: Efa, Torsha

Wardrobe: Sozpodor by Tenzing

Styling: Tenzing Chakma

Makeup: Badhon

Faria Athar Khan on navigating illnesses and ageing with yoga

What often goes unaddressed in Bangladeshi women's health is how much they lose themselves in the process of making others happy. Managing the household, raising children, juggling a social life and a career all at once can severely rattle our hormones. Which in turn impacts our weight, nutrition, productivity, as well as physical and mental health. Eventually, this manifests in the body as chronic lifelong illnesses.

Fortunately, yoga instructor Faria Athar Khan is helping women of all ages change this narrative. The Founder of YogMind has been practising for 10 years and teaching yoga for six years. Before teaching Hatha yoga full-time, Faria was a school teacher at Sunbeams School for 15 years.



According to her, 'Ha' in Sanskrit stands for the sun, and the 'tha' translates to moon. These two planets deeply impact the state and wellness of our bodies. Her commitment to yoga led her to do a three-month teacher's training course from Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana in Bangalore, India. Currently, she's completing her Master's in Yoga Therapy from the institute.

"I learned that physical and mental wellness, or the 'Asan', is one of the primary components of this practice, followed by 'Pranayam', the breathing exercises and 'Dhyan', which is meditation. These three pillars of yoga are recognised worldwide," she says.

Faria's study focuses on the management of stress and hypertension amongst women aged 20+ to 60+ through Pranayam. Drawing from her own lived experiences and others', she notices a decline in women's physical activities in their 30s.

Stress: the root of it all

Faria explains, "women don't have the time to look after themselves. This stress, coupled with anxiety, keeps piling up, especially when children get older. By their 40s, women are fixated on their children's future, academics and their life choices, while also shouldering domestic and



financial responsibilities," she highlights.

The bridge between our mind and body is breathing — we are often unaware of our own breathing as a result of always being in a rush. This surfaces as unpleasant sensations in the body in the form of pain. Not stretching or resting from work can lead to back pain and eventually attack our internal organs.

Hijacked by Hormones

As children grow up and become busy with their own lives, these women are left to figure out an identity beyond motherhood. "During this time, feelings of devaluation also crop up. Amidst this identity crisis comes menopause. While some experience it in their 40s, others develop it in their 50s. Hormonal imbalance can truly destabilise our lives. Thyroid problems are quite common in women, and their effects can often go unnoticed. The body starts depleting nutrients, energy and muscle strength. Thus, resulting in unanticipated weight gain, irrespective of whether we eat or not," she says.

Faria informs that yoga helps stabilise the secretion glands. In addition, women can include walking, strengthening exercises to gain endurance, patience and emotional resilience.

Weight a Minute...

Like most women, Faria is also fixated on weight loss as a fitness goal. But three months into practice, she still wasn't losing weight. "I realised it is necessary to be patient as the impact of yoga is not immediately visible. Yoga encourages flexibility in our bodies, which can enable us to power through more difficult asanas — ultimately promoting weight loss," she explains.

Simultaneously, it is essential to track our meals. No matter how much we exert ourselves physically, it is necessary to have balanced meals to keep our weight in check. It's not just about controlling our food intake, but also about meeting our nutritional needs at the right time.

Faria observes that there are a lot of people who are stressed and eating less. Yet, they still are not losing any weight in certain parts of their bodies. She emphasises that intermediate-level asanas do not promote weight loss since they are easy to do for people of all ages. However, doing them regularly increases our strength and endurance to attempt advanced-level asanas, which are no less than the stretches and exercises taught at the gym or recommended by physiotherapists.

Braving what's beyond control

Diabetes impacts other organs such as the kidneys, heart, and eyes. Faria explains that some people inherit diabetes after turning 50 if they have two diabetic parents. She adds that type 2 diabetes is also very common in people. Although some women develop it as gestational diabetes during pregnancy, there's always a chance of it returning after 40. However, with yoga, those who are already at risk of developing diabetes can learn to manage symptoms even if they have it for a

lifetime.

Faria Athar Khan stresses that early consciousness means early prevention, even management, against all odds. If people start practising yoga in their 20s, then people who don't have the condition can minimise future risks. In case they develop it later, they can still learn to manage it.

"There are some asanas which help keep diabetes at bay, for example, twisting the body, side or backwards bending. These increase our insulin secretion, keep the pancreas healthy, and thus delay the diabetes diagnosis. A lot of my students have shared that their diabetes has improved and does not spin out of control. And those who are elderly and have been practising with me for five years have not developed diabetes yet," she says.

Choosing to live at all ages

Yoga helped Faria embrace stillness in the face of stress, anxiety and overthinking. Today, she's able to run half marathons, despite being a mother of three and a full-time yoga teacher. Faria vouches that Hatha yoga is a safe practice for people of all ages. It also helps with physically strengthening the body, promoting flexibility, and boosting confidence.

"I have students aged 60+ coming to my yoga studio. Initially, they would use a stick when taking the stairs. Now they no longer need a crutch. Seeing this change in them gives me a certain sense of peace," she shares.

Additionally, this practice has given them a community beyond yoga. Faria and her students get to connect over movies, lunch, and retreats. She leaves the profound reminder that, "Forties and fifties are a time when women need something else beyond family and children. Yoga provides a sense of belonging and a chance to return to oneself."

By Rubab Nayeem Khan

Photo: Courtesy



#PERSPECTIVE

Inside Bangladesh's double shift for women

From managing offices to managing kitchens, Bangladeshi women navigate exhaustion, guilt, and invisibility. As women balance paid work with unpaid household labour, the cost is often their own mental health.

At barely 6 AM, Alifa Islam Monty was already on her second chore of the day. The full-time moderator for a popular skincare page had mapped out her day the night before. She warmed her infant son's breakfast while he slept, packed her daughter's schoolbag, checked her day's messages, and logged in to work.

"I schedule everything in advance so it doesn't all fall apart," Alifa Islam Monty said. "After getting my daughter ready for school, I sit at my computer for four or five hours of uninterrupted work. In between, I squeeze in 20 to 30 minutes to feed my son. When she comes home at lunch, I pick her up, cook, clean, serve everyone, then start working again."

Her tightly managed routine comes at a cost. By dusk, Monty is back in the kitchen preparing tea and dinner, then returns to her workstation. "Everything gets done, but there's no time for me, not even a proper shower or meal," she laughed.

Monty's story is familiar to millions of Bangladeshi women who perform what sociologists call a "double shift" — paid employment outside the home alongside the unpaid labour of housework and caregiving.

The strain of doing two full-time jobs, especially without recognition, can take a severe toll on mental health.

According to a recent study published in PMC PubMed Central on rural women in Mymensingh district, mental disorders are widespread. Studies show between 6.5 and 31 per cent of Bangladeshi adults live with mental disorders. In some villages, one in five women battles major depression, often in silence. Approximately 20 per cent of rural Bangladeshi women suffer from major depressive disorder.

Faysal Ahmed Rafi, a clinical psychologist and founder of Mindwizz, has been treating women experiencing what he calls 'slowly boiling exhaustion.'

"Women doing a double shift, both at home and outside, are not getting rest," he said. Long hours in unsafe workplaces, sexual harassment, and the guilt of not spending enough time with family combine to trigger chronic depression, anxiety, and phobias.

"We're seeing something tragic: after 40, many women develop psychosomatic illnesses, headaches, diabetes, chest pain,

high blood pressure, because long-term stress literally eats them from within."

Mood swings and irritability, often dismissed as character flaws, are symptoms of constant crisis management.

He added, "They have almost no chance to calm down. Their tolerance drops, yet society brands them short-tempered instead of recognising the lack of self-care and mental health resources. Most women don't know where to seek help; they've never been educated on mental health.

This neglect



leads to

conditions such as bipolar and borderline personality disorders appearing increasingly early in life. It's heartening that some women, thanks to growing awareness, are seeking help. But the majority tolerate the burden in silence and risk existential isolation."

He believes change must start at home: "If families and society acknowledge women's mental health needs and men share chores while children carry small responsibilities, the burden eases significantly."

For many working women, the burden is not just the hours but the sense that their labour is undervalued.

Tahsin Tanjin, 29, runs a small makeup business while caring for her nine-month-old. She laughed when asked about balance, though it sounded more like surrender. "At this age, he needs me 24/7... At the end of the day, it's my baby's needs that I sacrifice most.



She doesn't believe her unpaid labour is valued.

"It's a big no, never. It's impossible to be equally valued. Your in-laws and your husband take it for granted. They forget so easily what you've done," she said, her frustration palpable.

Sumaya Tasmim Kheya, 25, an MTO in Mercantile Bank, has tried to control the imbalance by controlling her hours.

"It's about prioritising," she said. "I refuse to spend so much time at the office that I can't see my family. I leave as early as possible, even if it slows my career. But if I can't give my family time, what's the point of working?"

She describes the trade-off as a choice between professional advancement and sanity.

"I don't think this should be a woman-specific problem," she said. "Why aren't men going home? Are they not helping their wives fix dinner? Men just leave the household duties to their wives. It's pathetic."

Sumaya's dual role is not a burden because of her supportive partner and in-laws. "If you have the right partner, it's never going to be a burden," she explained. "I earn money so I can manage my home better, that's my philosophy. Earning makes me feel like I'm contributing to our future, so that's empowering."

Her husband's family even prepares her breakfast and snacks so she can focus on work. But corporate culture still punishes her for choosing her family.

"In banking, bosses expect you to stay until 8:30 or 9 PM just to seem busy," she said. "I leave at 6 or 6:30 PM, and it will affect my career. They think I have no drive. But I'll always choose dinner with my family over a bonus."

In contrast, Tanin Sultana Sabiha, a housewife, aged 27, said watching other women juggle both roles makes her feel "low...worthless." "I don't feel important

anymore," she admitted. "My husband never belittles me for not having a job, but I definitely suffer for being unemployed. I could have walked out of situations where I was disrespected if I had a job."

Tanin's story highlights a cruel irony: domestic labour, though essential, is so devalued that women who "only" do housework feel expendable.

Men's perspectives underscore the tension between ideology and practice.

Samiul Bhuiya, a screenplay writer whose wife works full-time, compares domestic labour to kayaking.

"It's a joint role," he said. "Both need to paddle simultaneously to move forward. If one partner tries to handle everything, the relationship becomes unstable."

Shahriaz Mottakin, who works in banking, agreed that household responsibilities must be shared, though not necessarily split evenly. "It can never be 50:50 all the time," he noted. "Sometimes, it's 70:30, sometimes 40:60. But don't consider maintaining the household only a woman's job."

Finally, partners and families must step up. Faysal Ahmed Rafi insists that shared responsibility is the simplest mental health intervention. "Housework should not be taken for granted as 'women's work,'" he said. "When men share chores and children take on age-appropriate tasks, the woman's burden eases dramatically, benefiting everyone."

Back in her kitchen, Alifa Islam Monty closes her laptop and wipes her hands on her apron. She has just taken a call about a product launch while stirring daal, and the baby is starting to fuss.

"You keep going," she says when asked how she copes. "There isn't any other choice."

Her words carry resilience, but they also reveal the starkness of the bargain women have been forced to accept. Unless Bangladesh shares the load between partners, families, employers and policymakers, the silent labour keeping households and economies running will continue to exact a heavy, invisible toll.

By Lamia Sultana Kakon
Writer, Educator, Literature Researcher
Photo: Collected



#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

SUDESHNA S CHOWDHURY:

Leading Dhaka's interior design revolution

When architect Sudeshna S Chowdhury began designing restaurant interiors about a decade ago, Dhaka's dining scene was just beginning to experiment with ambience. Back then, most owners were not thinking about lighting tones or layout flow.

"There wasn't much emphasis on how a space could affect how people feel," Sudeshna S Chowdhury recalls. "Briefs were basic. People usually did not think of interiors as a key part of the dining experience."

Ten years later, that has changed, and so has she. Today, as the founder of STUDIO.O, Sudeshna is among the few interior architects who have spent a decade shaping how Dhaka eats, works, and breathes inside its cafés and restaurants.

The journey of Sudeshna

Sudeshna's design journey began in 2013 with Dot Architects, but it was in 2020, amid a shifting design landscape, that she officially launched her interior decor studio.

"I realised that interiors were what I really wanted to pursue," she reflects. "With the studio, I wanted to create meaningful spaces that respond not just to function but to how people live, reflect, and feel."

For the last decade, her work, especially in food spaces, has quietly helped redefine how interior design is viewed in Bangladesh. "From the very beginning, our design philosophy has focused on journeys rather than decorative elements," she says.

Whether navigating the chaotic rhythms of Dhaka or responding to new global shifts around wellness, sustainability, and flexible living, the company has stayed consistent in its core belief: that a space must feel right, not just look right.

As Sudeshna puts it, "We've evolved in technique and detailing, but our foundation – rooted, responsive design –



has remained the same."

From blueprints to meaning

Trained as an architect, Sudeshna started her professional journey soon after earning her license. "When I began taking on interior projects, I realised how much I enjoyed it," she says. "It came with challenges, but also rewards."

In 2013, she handled her first commercial projects, including food spaces that would unknowingly define her future direction. By 2020, her growing interest in how environments impact behaviour pushed her to establish her own practice.

"I wanted to create meaningful spaces," she explains. "We felt that the interior design scene in Bangladesh and globally needed a more holistic way of thinking."

That shift from function to feeling was gradual but intentional. Her breakthrough came with the SAJIDA Foundation head office project, where she experimented with empathy-led design.

"Their brief focused on care and transparency," she recalls.

"We used warm materials, open layouts,



and quiet green corners. Months later, they told me the space had changed their daily rhythm; they felt more connected and less stressed. That's when I knew interiors could be emotionally restorative."

Calm as a design choice

For someone working in Dhaka, designing "peace" can sound idealistic. The city is noisy, dense, and unpredictable, but to Sudeshna, that's precisely what fuels creativity. "Noise, heat, and congestion are all part of Dhaka's identity," she says. "We can't fight them, but we can design intelligently around them."

Her firm uses layered materials, natural ventilation, and acoustic zoning to achieve quietude.

"Peace in Dhaka is not about silence," she reflects. "It's about balance. A space can feel grounded even amidst chaos, if it breathes, filters, and flows naturally."

Restaurant design was one of her earliest fascinations, and the field that evolved the most under her watch. "Our first restaurant project was ten years ago," she says. "The owner gave us complete creative freedom. There was no fixed brief, which allowed us to explore materials and ideas freely."

That kind of freedom, she admits, has become rare. "Today, clients come with

more exposure and specific expectations. They want authenticity. Between 2020 and 2023, everyone wanted 'Instagrammable elements' – photo-worthy walls or statement installations."

STUDIO.O designed a few such features, Laughing Buddha among them, but Sudeshna never lost sight of the bigger picture. "We've always prioritised the overall experience of a space rather than one striking element. Lighting, texture, and layout must tell a cohesive story. Even in our first restaurant, each room had its own character, designed to make people feel part of a journey."

A studio of balance and shared ownership

"We've always aimed to stay gender-neutral," she says. "Women have long been present in this profession. What matters now is creating a workspace where everyone, regardless of gender, feels equally heard and responsible."

Collaboration sits at the heart of that approach. "We work in a way where leadership is shared," she explains. "Everyone owns their project, and together we own the company. That's how we grow – by learning from each other, not by competing."

The next chapter

Beyond restaurants and boutique interiors, Sudeshna has steadily expanded into large-scale commercial work through her role as a partner at Binyash & Associated Partners. One of her earlier significant projects was the BGMEA Bhaban in Diabari, where she led the interior design for the public areas and offices. That project, completed nearly four years ago, marked a turning point.

"I'd like to do more projects like that," she says. "Ones that merge Bangladeshi design sensibilities with international standards. Projects that prove our interiors can be globally relevant while staying rooted in context."

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy

Your brain prioritises criticism over praise — Here's why

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

This means that while one offhand insult can stay with you for years, a dozen kind words from last week can barely register. The memory of the negative sticks; the memory of the good fades.

In a study of emotional face recognition, researchers found a consistent tendency to interpret ambiguous faces as negative — a sign of negativity bias in action. Another paper reviewed multiple neuroscience methods (fMRI, ERP studies) and concluded that negative information is processed more rapidly and deeply than positive information.

Knowing the bias exists is the first step

in rewiring the tilt. The next is working around it — not by denying or suppressing negativity (that's necessary), but by deliberately strengthening your positive experiences so they register more fully.

One small shift in how you respond to a compliment or criticism is not just emotional hygiene but akin to rewiring the brain. Your biology might be set up to remember the sting, but with intention, you can also make it remember the healing. And that's less about denying reality than about redefining what we give power to.

By Ayman Anika

Photo: Collected



◆ HOROSCOPE ◆



ARIES
(MAR. 21-APR. 20)

A burst of confidence fuels new beginnings. Avoid hasty decisions and trust your instincts. Your lucky day this week is Tuesday.



TAURUS
(APR. 21-MAY 21)

Financial clarity arrives midweek. Stay steady and practical in relationships. Comfort brings strength. Your lucky day this week is Friday.



GEMINI
(MAY 22-JUN. 21)

Conversations open new doors. A surprise message could shift your mood. Embrace flexibility. Your lucky day this week is Wednesday.



CANCER
(JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Home and heart matter most. Nurture connections but avoid emotional overload. Your lucky day this week is Monday.



LEO
(JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

Creative sparks fly! Recognition or praise is likely. Stay humble amid success. Your lucky day this week is Sunday.



VIRGO
(AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

Organisation leads to peace. Sort out priorities and clear old clutter. Your lucky day this week is Thursday.



LIBRA
(SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

Balance love and ambition carefully. A charming encounter could brighten the week. Your lucky day this week is Saturday.



SCORPIO
(OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Hidden truths emerge.
Trust your intuition.
Avoid unnecessary conflict.
Your lucky day this week is
Monday.



SAGITTARIUS
(NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Adventure calls! A spontaneous plan revives your spirit. Say yes to change. Your lucky day this week is Thursday.



CAPRICORN
(DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Hard work pays off quietly. Recognition comes soon—keep patience. Your lucky day this week is Wednesday.



AQUARIUS
(JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

Innovative ideas
shine. Collaborate wisely
and think long-term.
Your lucky day this week is
Saturday.



PISCES
(FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Emotional tides run deep — channel them into art or reflection. Healing energy surrounds you. Your lucky day this week is Friday.

স্বর্ণের ছোয়ায়, তোমার উপমায়,
বদলে দিলে যে আমায়...

অ্যান্ডালিনা সোপ

রূপচর্চায় আদ্রিজাত্য...

KOHINOOR
CHEMICAL

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#ALTERNATIVE HEALING



The best yoga poses to help you through the final stages of pregnancy

Congratulations, mummy! The journey of motherhood is reaching its most beautiful milestone — the moment of meeting the little one. The third trimester marks the preparation phase, when both body and mind begin to ready themselves for birth. It is a time to slow down, breathe deeper, and move mindfully.

As the baby grows, the body experiences pressure on internal organs, often leading to heartburn, lower back pain, swelling, and disturbed sleep. The hormone “relaxin” softens the joints, preparing the pelvis for delivery, while “progesterone” can cause fluid retention and dizziness.

Gentle yoga at this stage eases discomfort, supports circulation, and brings calm awareness to the birthing body.

Standing and restorative poses strengthen the lower body, maintain posture, and prepare the pelvis for labour. These safe, grounding postures can be practised slowly and consciously under the guidance of a prenatal yoga instructor.

Yoga poses for the third trimester (28 weeks to birth)

Ankle Rotation and Stretch

Sit comfortably and bend one leg, placing the foot over the opposite knee. Rotate the foot slowly in a full circle, ten times in each direction. Repeat with the other foot. This simple movement relieves stiffness, improves blood circulation, and reduces swelling in the ankles and feet — common discomforts in late pregnancy. Stretching in and out will help prevent sudden calf-

muscle cramps at night.

Baddha Konasana (Butterfly Pose)

Sit with the legs extended forward. Bend the knees and bring the soles of the feet together, keeping the heels close to the body. Hold the feet and gently move the knees up and down without force. This pose opens the hips, increases blood flow to the pelvic floor, and helps the body get used to the sensation of softening and opening — essential for labour preparation.

Malasana (Garland Pose)

Stand with feet slightly wider than hip-width apart, toes pointing outward. Slowly lower into a squat, keeping the spine long and hands joined in prayer at the chest. Elbows gently press against the knees. Support, such as a cushion or small blocks, can also be used. Malasana opens the hips, strengthens the legs, and enhances flexibility in the lower back and pelvis. It promotes proper alignment for childbirth and can even be used during early labour for comfort.

Utkata Konasana (Goddess Pose)

Stand with feet wide apart, toes turned outward. Bend the knees and lower the hips, keeping the spine straight. Rest the hands on the thighs or bring them to the prayer position. This powerful stance strengthens the thighs and pelvic floor while opening the hips. A gentle side-to-side sway can make the pose soothing — a movement that can also help during labour to manage contractions.



Supported Savasana (Side Lying Relaxation Pose)

Lie on the left side, supporting the head with a pillow. Place another cushion between the knees and one under the belly for comfort. Close your eyes and breathe slowly. This restorative pose allows full relaxation, reduces back strain, and promotes better blood flow to the baby. It's ideal for calming the body before sleep or rest. Alternatively, Savasana can be practised on a reclining incline using bolsters or pillows behind the back, ensuring the chest and belly remain lifted and comfortable.

Breathe and let go

In the final weeks, pranayama becomes

a powerful ally. Abdominal breathing is a simple yet powerful way to stay relaxed in late pregnancy and during labour.

Sit or lie comfortably, placing one hand on the belly. Inhale through the nose, allowing the abdomen to rise, and exhale gently through the mouth, letting it fall. Continue this calm rhythm for a few minutes. This breathing improves oxygen flow, relaxes the nervous system, and helps manage contractions for a smoother birthing experience.

The journey to birth is not just about endurance — it's about grace, grounding, and connection with life itself.

Disclaimer:

The information provided in this article is for general awareness only and should not be considered medical advice. Prenatal yoga practices must be performed under the supervision of a certified instructor and with approval from a healthcare provider. Each pregnancy is unique, and modifications may be required to ensure comfort and safety.

By Farhana Abir

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