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World of WONDER

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#LIFEHACKS

SIMPLE WAYS TO REPLACE YOUR MOST HARMFUL HABITS

Smoking, scrolling for hours before bed, biting nails during stress, drinking too much fizzy soda, skipping breakfast, oversleeping mornings after staying awake all night, procrastinating important tasks till the last minute, and many more of our daily habits are more harmful than we think. These habits slip into our lives quietly, and settle into our schedules without much thought. However, over time, they shape our health, mood, productivity more than we realise.

To begin with, smoking remains one of the most harmful habits, despite widespread awareness. Beyond the well-known risks related to lungs and heart, nicotine makes cravings feel urgent and difficult to ignore.

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#PETS

Everything you must know before neutering your pet

Are you tired of your pet escaping your house, littering in unwanted places or showing aggressive behaviours or fighting with other pets? In that case, neutering might be the solution to all of your pet-problems.

In simple terms, neutering is the surgical procedure of sterilising a pet to prevent reproduction.

Neutering in male animals is called castration, while for females, it's called spaying. The latter is a bit risky and complicated, as it is concerned with removal of internal organs such as the uterus.

Importance of neutering

Whether or not to neuter your pet is totally up to you, but here are a couple of things you should know before making such a crucial decision.

Dr Md Tanvir Ul Alam, who is a Veterinary Officer at Animedcare, mentions, "If a cat or dog is suffering from cardiac problems and respiratory problems like asthma or pneumonia, anaesthesia becomes really risky. Neutering should not be done in such conditions."

By removing reproductive organs, uterus in females and testicles in males, neutering prevents your pet suffering from uterus or testicular cancer, alongside giving protection from bacterial infections.

Treatment duration

It might seem an intimidating process to you but in reality, vets handle it perfectly. The surgery would be done in 30 to 90 minutes and your pet is good to go!

Anaesthesia is given during the surgery, so no need to worry for any pain during the process. To prevent vomiting during anaesthesia, avoid feeding your cat or dog 10–12 hours before surgery, and stop giving water 6 hours beforehand.

When inquired about the ideal timing for neutering, he replies, "Normally, it should be done at five to six months of age. For females, it's best if done before the first heat (reproductive cycle)."

Conditions for neutering

The surgery should never be done at home, since a perfectly sterilised environment cannot be ensured. You certainly don't want your furry little friend to suffer from post-surgery infections.

Before choosing the perfect veterinary clinic for your pet, always check that the operation theatre is properly equipped with sterilised needles, emergency medication, oxygen, and blood supply.

"100 per cent aseptic conditions must be maintained in the operation theatre to avoid infections in the animal," emphasises Dr Tanvir.

Post-treatment take care

Once the surgery is completed, the vet's duty is almost done. Now comes your part to become a responsible pet parent.

Dr Tanvir mentions, "We usually prescribe a medicine for five to seven days after neutering."

You can choose either the injectable or oral form of medicine, whichever suits your pet, so there's no need to stress over feeding it to your pet.

Allow your pawed companion to relax as much as possible and limit their movement for at least a week after the procedure, particularly for cats, which are habitually more active.

"In the two weeks following surgery, take extra care to keep the site of incision (area where the cut has been made) dry at all times, even after littering," advises Dr Tanvir

You might find your cats and dogs trying to lick the incision area. If you don't stop them from doing so, it would make the area wet with saliva. Pet wears like collars, muzzles, or surgical socks come in handy.

Strict parenting sometimes applies to pets too. According to him, "For one week following neutering, do not take them to play dates or let them mix with other cats and dogs."

Changes in lifestyle habits

"Pets usually recover within five to seven days. At most, the follow-up visits to the vet can last up to two weeks," states Dr Tanvir.

Once your cat or dog has fully recovered, and its ready to resume its normal life, you should pay more attention to its daily routines.

During summer, shower your neutered cat once or twice a month, and if you have a dog, give it a shower once a week. Avoid showering your pet in winter unless it is a big dog.

If you have a large dog, take it out for a walk twice daily. But do make sure the place is free of any ticks and fleas.

Dr Tanvir advises not to bring neutered cats out of the house. But if it is necessary, you can carry your cat in your lap with a belt, preferably.

Worried about which diet to specifically follow for your neutered pet? We got you. Dr Tanvir highlights, "The best diet would be the one rich in fibre, with proteins like boiled chicken alongside boiled vegetables like pumpkin, broccoli."

In case you are buying ready-made packaged food, pick one with the best quality.

The environment of your house matters as well. Avoid excessive lighting and keep every corner free of dust to ensure the perfect atmosphere for your little friend to reside in after neutering.

For any pet owner, what seems to come before their own life is their pet's life. They care for their furry little companions more than they care for themselves sometimes. Now that you know all the important guidelines for neutering, we trust you to take the best care of your fur-friend!

By Labiba Tasnim
Photo: Collected

Simple ways to replace your most harmful habits

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Some behavioural specialists recommend using "stop-smoking" mobile phone apps that track triggers and offer timed breathing exercises to manage urges in real time.

In addition, people can also keep flavoured chewing gums with them whenever the cravings of a cigarette begin to kick in. This can also help to distract one from puffing a cigarette or vape.

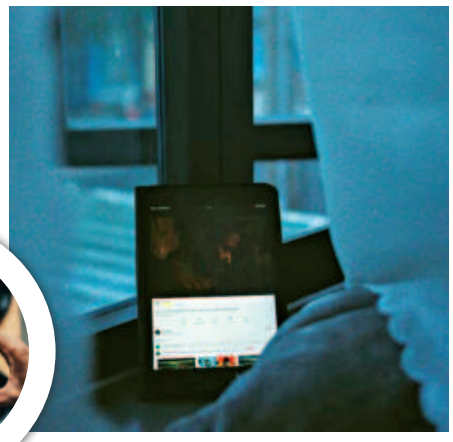
Doomscrolling has become another common modern habit. Constantly consuming negative news and social media updates does not only increase stress and disturb sleep patterns, but also leads to a more pessimistic mindset. Therefore, in order to combat this, one can rather move to using e-book apps, choosing some light-hearted books or articles or even read stances penned by motivational speakers.

Excessive caffeine and sugary soda intake are another overlooked issue. While a cup of tea or coffee can improve alertness, repeated high doses may raise heart rate, disturb sleep, and increase irritability. Nutrition experts suggest gradually replacing one daily sugary drink with sparkling water or infused water to reduce sugar without feeling deprived. Many brands are producing different flavours to mix with water and drink on a regular basis.

Nail-biting may seem minor, but it does damage the skin while spreading bacteria and weakening nail beds. Instead of relying on willpower alone, dermatologists often suggest applying bitter-tasting nail coatings, or keeping nails neatly trimmed to reduce temptations. Some people benefit from using fidget tools or stress balls to redirect nervous energy.

Another growing concern seen among young adults is the habit of checking phones constantly, even if there are no notifications. This behaviour interrupts focus and deep-thinking time. Simple steps such as turning off non-essential notifications, moving distracting apps off the home screen, or setting the fixed "phone-free" hours can significantly help lower usage. Also turning Wi-Fi off when the phone is not in use is also helpful.

Late-night sleeping and irregular routines also affect long term health. Poor sleep has been linked to weakened immunity and reduced mental clarity. Experts recommend setting a consistent sleep schedule and avoiding screens at least 30 minutes before bed to reset the body's rhythm. Also, taking early supper is a key factor to get a good night's sleep.



Procrastination is a quieter but equally harmful habit. Delaying tasks increases stress and reduces self-confidence over time. Procrastination also leads to pessimistic and cranky attitude among young adults. Behavioural research suggests breaking tasks into very small steps, even five-minute actions, to overcome the mental block that causes delay.

What connects all these habits is not weakness, but repetition due to lack of determination. Habits form when the brain links a cue to a routine and a reward. Replacing the routine, rather than fighting the urge directly, is often more effective. There is an old saying — "Old habits die hard" — so, we need to be consistent as only then can a vivid change be more obvious.

For example, if boredom leads to scrolling, keeping a book within reach offers an easy substitute. If stress triggers smoking, stepping outside for a short walk or practicing guided breathing through an app can create a similar calming effect. Small changes repeated daily slowly rewire behaviour.

Most importantly, habit change works best when the environment supports it. Keeping unhealthy snacks out of sight, charging phones away from the bed, or placing reminders on desks can gently influence behaviour without constant effort. These subtle adjustments reduce reliance on willpower.

Everyday bad habits do not disappear overnight, and perfection is not the goal. Progress comes from steady, practical adjustments, rather than extreme rules. Over time, healthier routines become just as automatic as the old ones.

By Sana Nawab
Photo: Collected

#WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL

FROM ADVERTISING TO AUTEUR
Raka Noshin Nower's expanding lens

Raka Noshin Nower did not enter filmmaking through film school. She entered it through observation.

An engineering student with no formal connection to cinema, she began her career at Applebox Films, where she spent nearly a decade working across roles. What began as a responsibility in casting gradually turned into something else.

"If someone is smart, you can pick up things that aren't even being taught," she says. She learned editing on her own. She made short films that, in her words, might have seemed "crazy" at the time. She shot travel videos. She experimented quietly.

"That time was like my school — a school of joy, a school of film, a school of discipline," she recalls. Those 10 years became her formation period. The experience gave her what she calls "a proper base" and, more importantly, the confidence to visualise a future beyond employment.

A studio with intent

Studio Yellow Something Limited began as a solo venture. But she never envisioned it as just a production house. "I never wanted to just make ads or just do business all day," she says. "I wanted to create a creative hub where people come to practice creativity."

For her, creativity is not limited to filmmaking. It is the ability to bring internal imagination into external form. It could be music, poetry, architecture, law — any discipline where ideas are shaped into reality.

Under that philosophy, the studio hosted a photo exhibition, titled Phultokka, and launched an educational initiative called the "Equanimity Session," a non-profit programme where professionals from diverse industries share lived experiences with young creatives. "Connecting with people and connecting with different communities is everything to me," she says.

Her team reflects that diversity. Associates have backgrounds in business, architecture, medicine, and NGOs. Some left stable jobs to work with her. "Maybe there will be less money, but the effort will be greater," she says. Financial scale was never her primary measure of success.

The discipline of advertising

Despite expanding into fiction, Nower

remains committed to advertising. She describes commercials as a compressed art form. "When you are given one page, and you have to write the equivalent of 50 pages, that's difficult," she explains. "You'll think a lot and write those five valuable lines."

That philosophy shaped her Grameenphone advertisement, told from a dog's perspective — a project she describes as deeply personal. "This is exactly the kind of work I want to do," she says. Animal-centric storytelling aligns with her own life; she owns a cat and is vocal about animal welfare.

Her debut telefiction Aar Theko Na Dure (2022), followed by another Closeup-backed project in 2023, marked her entry into longer storytelling formats. "A heartfelt thought can be said in five seconds or in five minutes, but the emotion should stay tight," she says. That remains her creative exercise — adapting emotional density to duration.

Gender, access, and perspective

Nower does not frame her work explicitly as activism, but gender informs her practice. "Women's participation itself is rare," she says of the industry. Merit, she suggests, is often secondary to access.

"Perspective is very important," she says. "We've seen many films from a male perspective for ages." While acknowledging that many male directors portray women thoughtfully, she insists that a woman's lens offers different angles — even when the subject is not explicitly female.

"I want to tell stories from a woman's perspective — whether the subject is a woman or a man," she says. She also expresses interest in exploring male psychology, admitting she grew up in a household of women and has rarely observed men closely.

Expanding the role: From Director to producer

In 2025, Nower was selected for the Asian Film Awards Academy's international film camp in Macau with her short film project Fish and Milk, centred on her mother and her cat. The seven-day scholarship workshop connected her with filmmakers across Asia and shifted her professional focus.

Mentors encouraged her to consider producing. Though she had been effectively producing through running her company, she sought formal training and applied to the Busan Asian Film School's seven-month Producing Fellowship.

She was selected as one of two fellows from Bangladesh, and the first Bangladeshi woman admitted into that programme.

"I want to learn properly and return," she says. Her goal is to support emerging directors who struggle with trust, funding, and production barriers. "I want to empower those kids with their crazy ideas," she adds.

Relentless application

Rejection is a recurring theme in her process. She applied to numerous film labs and festivals before receiving acceptance. "I got rejected many times," she says. But the process strengthened her pitch decks and sharpened her projects.

One such project, Mangsho Kom, received a Bangladesh government grant. The story addresses taboos and body-related trauma. "I never thought they would give me a grant for this subject," she admits. The approval, she says, renewed her faith in institutional openness to diverse narratives.

The film has completed shooting and is now in post-production. "I think I'm in the unstoppable category," she says, half in jest. "Stopping feels very secondary to me. We only lead one life."

For now, she is not choosing between ads, fiction, animals, or women's stories. She is building capacity — technical, institutional, emotional — to hold them all.

And she is not waiting for permission.

By Ayman Anika
Photo Courtesy: Shadab Shahrokh Hai, Asian Film Awards Academy & SYS team

Celebrate Eid in Style- Your No. 1 Family Destination at Apex

This Eid, Apex Footwear Limited walks into the spotlight with the largest campaign of the year, celebrating its position as it reflects Apex's vision to become the ultimate Eid's No.1 stylish destination for families across the nation. This campaign marks the reunion of two of the country's biggest celebrities- actress Jaya Ahsan and the beloved Ziaul Faruq Apurba- appearing together for the first time in 19 years.

Under the title of 'Stylee No.1', Apex reflects its vision to be the ultimate stylish destination for families nationwide. This year features the largest footwear drop in the nation, offering a carefully curated festive collection for every age group. While offering a versatile range for the whole family, Apex places special emphasis on its Ladies' Range, showcasing a masterclass in elegance, modern sophistication, and ethereal detailing, truly upholding the theme of 'Stylee No.1, Eid Trend-e Family Fun'.

By combining the timeless influence of these stars with unmatched product excellence, Apex strengthens its position as the No.1 brand in style. From the bold trends of the men's collection to the joyful comfort of the kids' range, Apex offers a premium shopping experience that ensures every family member finds their perfect match this Eid.

#WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL

How Farah Noshin Bhuiyan rebuilt her life through Muay Thai after surviving cancer

At 39 kilograms, Farah Noshin Bhuiyan – also known as Noshin Knight – was rebuilding a body that cancer had almost erased.

Today, she steps into a Muay Thai ring knowing her nose might break again. Between those two realities is not a miracle story. It is discipline. In 2015, during her third year studying Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, she was diagnosed with first-stage colon cancer.

"I was a very bright student since childhood," she says. Her father, an assistant scientist, had dreamed she would become a scientist. That path stopped abruptly.

For eighteen months, she underwent treatment. "I was around 39 kgs when I recovered," she recalls. "You can imagine how frail that is for someone who is five feet two inches." At one point, doctors warned that part of her colon might have to be surgically removed and replaced with an external waste bag. "You can imagine how terrifying that scenario is," she says. Her father insisted on trying therapy first. After four cycles of chemotherapy, the cancer receded.

But recovery was not a clean exit. Even today, she undergoes APC (Argon Plasma Coagulation) procedures two to three times a year to control internal bleeding. She has annual biopsies. "The doctors say the cancer could return anytime."

Surviving cancer, she says, felt like a second birth.

The body as project

After returning to complete her B.Sc., she realised something had shifted. "My body wasn't like it used to be. I felt very frail." That weakness bothered her more than fear. Her mother enrolled her in Karate classes.

"I developed a strong liking towards fitness," she shares.

From 2016 to 2019, she trained relentlessly and earned her Karate Black Belt. Then came COVID-19. Gyms closed.

Momentum stalled. In 2021, she joined boxing. She fought twice and lost both matches. "My coach said, 'Get in the ring. It doesn't matter if you lose. You need the experience.'"

Experience led her to Muay Thai.

Why Muay Thai

She is quick to clarify: Muay Thai is not MMA. "Boxing only involves punches. Muay Thai has kicks, elbow strikes, knee strikes, and sweeps. MMA includes ground fighting."

She joined the Bangladesh Muay Thai circuit at the end of 2022. Her coach, Ishtiak Ahmed Chowdhury, Coach at Invictus BJJ & MMA, helped refine her technique and ring strategy.

In December 2024, she represented Bangladesh at the IFMA East Asian Muay Thai Championship in Hong Kong, competing in the Women's 48 kg category. Her nose was broken mid-match. The fight was stopped due to heavy bleeding.

"I didn't lose on score," she says. "They stopped it for safety."

In July, at "Double Horse Knockout Night 1" in Dhaka, she fought a 16-year-old opponent. She is 33. She won. "For me, winning or losing is secondary," she says. "The fact that I can still play in this physical condition is enough."

Her next challenge is the Four Nation Muay Thai Championship in Pakistan this May, where Bangladesh will compete alongside India, Pakistan, and Iran.

Money, myth, and reality

There is a common assumption in Bangladesh that fitness and combat sports are financially unstable careers. She rejects that outright. "People think there is no money in fitness or as a fighter," she says. "That is not true."

Through coaching, training clients, and building her platform, she earns more than Tk 1 lakh per month. She funds her own career. During her early training years, she paid for boxing through private tuition work and coaching. "No one handed me money and told me to do this," she says. Her family supported her emotionally and provided shelter, but financially, she had to carry herself.

To her, the idea that fitness is not a "real" career is outdated. "If you look at millionaires and billionaires globally, most of them are athletes or deeply connected to sports culture," she says. "Fitness is important — not just physically, but economically."

Strength over everything else

Her vision now extends beyond competition. She wants girls in Bangladesh to train — not necessarily to fight professionally, but to defend themselves. "Every girl should learn to fight," she says. "It makes them confident in daily life."

She challenges the cultural fixation on slimness. "In Bangladesh, women think they should only do cardio to stay thin. It doesn't matter if you are fat or thin. What matters is if you are strong." She encourages parents, especially, to let their daughters participate in combat sports. "This is how girls will learn to defend themselves."

When she walks alone, she says she does not feel vulnerable. "My gait, my gaze, my speech — they show confidence." Often, presence alone prevents confrontation.

The second life

Before cancer, she wanted to be a scientist. After cancer, she began questioning meaning. "Surviving cancer is like a second birth," she says. "The meaning of my existence matters now."

She wants Muay Thai to receive full Federation recognition in Bangladesh, opening institutional support for future athletes. She does not ask for personal benefits. "If the sport grows, I will naturally benefit."

Today, her life is not arranged around fear or approval. It is arranged around improvement.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy

To follow Farah Noshin Bhuiyan's training journey and upcoming competitions, visit her Instagram profile: @noshinknight.

LITTLE LOOKS, BIG CELEBRATIONS

Dressing Kids for Eid the Right Way

Let's face it — half the joy of Eid shopping is buying for the kids. Tiny panjabis. Mini kameezes. Pocket-sized waistcoats. Dresses that twirl dramatically for no reason at all. Children in festive wear just feel like Eid.

But somewhere between "Awww" and "Let's take a thousand photos," we sometimes forget one important thing: Kids do not care about structure, layering, or perfect pleats.

They care about running around, eating less, climbing furniture, and running again. So, when it comes to dressing children for Eid, the golden rule is simple — comfort first, everything else after.

THE NON-NEGOTIABLE

Adults can tolerate a slightly tight sleeve or a heavy dupatta for a few hours. Children cannot. And they shouldn't have to.

Eid mornings are long. There are guests, hugs, food, visits, and photos. If an outfit is itchy, stiff, too layered, or difficult to move in, it won't survive the day — and neither will your patience.

Choose breathable fabrics. Soft cotton blends, lightweight silk-cotton mixes, airy lawn, or smooth satin lining under traditional pieces make a world of difference. Avoid anything scratchy on the inside, especially for toddlers. For boys, soft panjabis with relaxed trousers or pyjamas work beautifully. A waistcoat is adorable, yes, but make sure it isn't too stiff. If they're uncomfortable, remove it after the photos. No harm done.

For girls, flowy frocks, light ghararas, or soft skirts with elastic waistbands are ideal. The outfit should move when they move. If it twirls? Even better. Because a happy child always looks better than a perfectly styled one.

TRADITION MATTERS — BUT KEEP IT LIGHT

Eid is about culture, connection, and memory. Dressing children in traditional wear helps them feel part of that heritage.

A little boy in a crisp kurta. A tiny girl in a pastel sharara. It's not just fashion — it's belonging.

But tradition doesn't have to mean heavy embroidery and multiple layers. Opt for subtle thread work instead of full embellishment. Choose lighter dupattas or skip them altogether for younger children. If you want a festive touch, add a small embroidered detail at the neckline or cuff instead of covering the entire outfit in sparkle.

The goal is to introduce them to tradition — not overwhelm them with it. And honestly? Kids look effortlessly festive, even in the simplest traditional cut.

COLOUR IS YOUR BEST FRIEND

Children carry bright colours better than adults ever could.

Bold reds, royal blues, sunflower yellow, mint green, coral — everything looks good on them. While adult Eid fashion may lean toward careful coordination, kids can absolutely pull off playful shades and prints.

Don't shy away from patterns either. Florals, subtle stripes, soft tie-dye effects, or tiny motifs add character without making the outfit look busy.

For siblings, coordinated colours (not identical outfits please, because it's 2026) look especially charming in photos. Think of the same colour family, different styles.

CASUAL NEVER FAILS

Here's something important: kids do not need to be dressed like miniature adults.

A smart two-piece set for a boy. A soft cotton dress for a girl. A pastel shirt with comfortable trousers. These are perfectly acceptable Eid choices — especially for second- or third-day gatherings.

After the formal photos are done, many children are happiest in something simpler. And that's completely fine. If they're comfortable, smiling, and enjoying themselves, the outfit has already succeeded.

ACCESSORIES: KEEP IT SAFE AND SIMPLE

For children, it's the delicate details that complete their look. For girls, tiny studs, soft bangles, or cute hair clips are more than enough. Avoid anything too heavy that could irritate or distract them. If they keep touching it, it's probably not practical.

For boys, traditional sandals, loafers, or comfortable slip-ons work well. Avoid shoes that need constant adjusting. If they can run in it without complaining, it's the right pair. And if the little gentlemen insist of looking dapper, get them a watch. It feels very grown up.

LET THEM BE THEMSELVES

The most important part of kids' Eid fashion is letting their personality shine through. If your daughter insists on wearing her favourite colour, let her. If your son wants to pair his kurta with slightly different shoes, it's not the end of the world.

Children don't remember perfect styling. They remember how Eid felt. As adults, we just need to find the right balance of comfort and style for them.

Because nothing is more adorable than a child who feels good in what they're wearing. And honestly? When it comes to kids, they will steal the show anyway.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Styling and Fashion Direction: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Models: Anaizaa, June, Rafid, Isa, Shehna, Mugdho
Wardrobe: Shishu Poribohon
Location: Babuland, Bailey Road

#FOOD & RECIPES

Balance your iftar table with fresh nutritious salads

As the Maghrib adhan echoes across the city, the ritual usually begins the same way: the table fills with deep-fried favourites like piyaju, beguni, and other savoury treats. They represent tradition, but our bodies have starved for hours. They crave revival, not something that leaves us sluggish before the night's prayers even begin. Perhaps, it is time to rethink that first bite, choosing something lighter, more hydrating and nourishing instead.

After a whole day, the body looks for easily digestible nutrients, and that's where salads come in. From steadying blood sugar to supporting immunity, salads provide essential minerals and ease the fatigue. Although salads are often considered boring or too light for the festive iftar table, with the right mix of ingredients, they can be colourful and flavourful.

Imagine juicy tomatoes, creamy avocado, tender chickpeas or even sweet bites of banana, dates and dragon fruit, all tossed together with a hint of olive oil, lemon juice or yoghurt dressing. Salads don't have to be plain. A sprinkle of nuts or lightly seasoned shredded white chicken can elevate them into something both nourishing and indulgent.

Building the perfect iftar bowl is like painting on a green canvas with different flavours. We can start with our kitchen staples like the crunch of cucumbers, sweetness of grated carrots, steamed lentils and baby spinach. Bridge these traditions with a touch of contemporary flair like dressings of cheese and spices. These are packed with water, fibre and essential vitamins which help the body rehydrate and recover fast.

Of course, a salad does not have to mean eating only leaves. Adding clean protein makes it satisfying and keeps energy levels steady through the evening. Boiled chickpeas, grilled or lightly seasoned white chicken or even sliced soft-boiled eggs can turn a simple bowl into a complete and energising meal.

Fruit is already a familiar part of iftar. Instead of serving it plain, they can be turned into lively salads with sliced apples, pears, dates or even dragon fruit. A sprinkle of chaat masala, a touch of honey or an occasional scoop of ice cream can make it feel festive. These are rich in natural sugars and help restore energy gently after a long fast.

Enhance salads with nuts: cashews for buttery richness, almonds for crisp snap, peanuts for bold crunch. These offer healthy fats and calories. Toasted nuts add the texture, while chia seeds bring an extra boost of fibre and nutrients. Cashew nut salads have redefined the urban palate in recent years. Including nuts in your iftar ensures that your hearty choice is also a healthy one.

Dressing is the soul of the bowl. Half a spoon of extra virgin olive oil and a little crushed garlic can turn your homemade simple salad into a restaurant-quality experience. You can also craft a Caesar-style dressing using rich egg yolks, yoghurt and a little grated hard cheese. Alternatively, a gyro-inspired thick dressing can satisfy a craving for something more substantial.

Choosing salad at iftar does not mean rejecting tradition. Reducing the portion of heavy feast items like alur chop, jilapi or haleem, and increasing fresh salads can make iftar lighter, more nourishing, and still celebratory. Salad provides hydration, heart health, and overall strength. Starting with a bowl of salad before reaching for heavier dishes can change how the entire meal feels. Even having salad alongside fried favourites makes a difference.

Eating healthy at iftar is about listening to the body after a long day of patience and choosing foods that restore rather than overwhelm. Salads offer this balance with their colours, textures and endless variations. This year, let's start with something different to embrace freshness and feel truly nourished.

By Mir Elham Bin Ahmed
Photo: Collected

#MUSING

Is chicken haleem even haleem?

Forgive me, readers, for stirring up a debate in Ramadan with a provocation served in a bowl — the very bowl that redeems iftar from the tragic mediocrity of piyaju and dates.

Yes, I'm talking about haleem. But not that chicken imposter skulking around the stalls, pretending to be something it's not. Because, according to the self-appointed tribunal of haleem loyalists, chicken haleem isn't just "less haleem" — it's not even haleem!

We even cornered a few haleem loyalists to defend their fiery proclamations, because food isn't merely eaten; it is defended. And defend they did.

"I'm sorry, but to me, chicken haleem is basically letka khichuri smashed and plated politely; throw in some vegetables and you are good to go," declares Farhan, 28, outside a Dhanmondi eatery.

Well, one can only wonder what sort of 'haleem' Farhan was served to make him compare it to letka khichuri!

However, Tanvir then jumps in, adjusting his glasses like a man about to defend a thesis. "Haleem didn't arrive yesterday," he says. "It travelled from Arabian harees, survived Mughal kitchens, impressed the Nizams of Hyderabad, and crossed borders before reaching Dhaka. You think it endured centuries just to be replaced by broiler chicken?"

No. Not in a million iftars. We agree!

"We Bangalis can't leave a recipe alone," laughs Aboni. "We see something traditional and immediately try to edit it. Add sugar here, remove spice there, replace the meat with whatever is affordable — and then insist it's authentic. That's how we ended up with chicken haleem. It's not evolution. Its impatience gone rogue."

She also shares, smirking, "Once my mother made chicken haleem for iftar. My dadi looked at it like we'd committed a felony. She goes, 'Dal and chicken? And where's the rice? How am I supposed to eat this?' My mother stopped messing with haleem after that."

Biva counters slightly. "It's about cost and convenience. Chicken is cheaper, faster to cook, available everywhere. Make beef or mutton as accessible as chicken, and watch people return to it. And, isn't this how culture shifts?"

Maybe!

But Tanvir is unconvinced, and frankly, neither are we. "Adaptation is not the same as dilution," he says, almost patiently. "Yes, recipes evolve. But not every alteration deserves the dignity of inheritance.

Haleem is built on endurance — on meat that withstands hours of slow fire until it surrenders completely. That surrender is the soul of the dish. Chicken doesn't have it. Call it innovation if you like, but beef is the foundation here, and structures often collapse when you try to replace their foundation."

And here, I agree with Tanvir, because sure, you can tweak the garnish, adjust the heat, experiment at the margins. But once you change the central covenant between meat and wheat, you're not adapting the recipe, you simply are rewriting it!

However, another voice from the group offers a counterpoint: "Not everyone can eat beef or mutton. Chicken haleem exists because people want to participate in the ritual without risking their health."

To which, loyalists (including me) roll their eyes in unison and respond: "Then call it chicken stew. Call it porridge. Call it anything. Just don't call it haleem. That word has history, patience, and honour — none of which are in your bowl."

No! Chicken in haleem is not a conspiracy. We are not saying that. It exists for reasons like cost, convenience, allergies, fear of a cholesterol spike. It undoubtedly lets more people participate in the ritual of having haleem at iftar. We get all of it. But that doesn't make it authentic. Let's not confuse accessibility with authenticity and pretend this is culinary creativity. Culinary creativity cannot be measured by accessibility alone.

So yes, eat your chicken if your health, budget, or schedule demands it. But let's call it what it is: a bowl of supply chain logic. Polite. Manageable. Fast. But not haleem. Not history. Not patience. Not art. Not devotion.

Final verdict? If you thought chicken in your haleem could ever inherit centuries of slow-cooked glory, congratulations. You have been charmed by convenience, and that, dear reader, is not tradition — that is compromise masquerading as culture.

By Jannatul Bushra
Illustration: K T Humaira
Photo: Collected

#TRAVEL

Mymensingh's Netrokona is probably not on your mind when picking a travel destination. Sure, names like Cheena Matir Pahar and Birishiri sound enticing; you keep hearing about these from time to time, but what else? Being such an underrated region for tourism, Netrokona is hardly ever in the limelight. But hopefully, after reading this piece, you will be convinced that this district is a gem for travellers! From picturesque scenery to sites of remembrance to an iconic sweet delicacy, Netrokona has a lot to offer.

Why Netrokona should be your next peaceful travel destination

Uniquely beautiful

Let's start with a prime attraction. Situated in Durgapur upazila are the China Clay Hills (Cheena Matir Pahar). It is not your usual set of hills, but rather a unique one. The small hills have a rugged outlook, standing brilliantly in whitish, reddish, and yellowish colours. The distinct geology accounts for this striking appearance.

Also striking are the water bodies surrounding it. Commonly referred to as Birishiri Lake, it perfectly complements the surrounding hills. Visitors are awed by the serene bluish-green waters.

To appreciate Durgapur is to cherish its uniqueness. We may see larger hills and lakes in other places of Bangladesh, but those of Durgapur are pleasantly unusual in their appearance!

Meanwhile, the nearby Someshwari River promises tranquillity. With portions of the sky blocked by distant hills, a boat ride offers beautiful views all around — a treat for the eyes!

Netrokona is dotted with a number of tilas, or small hills. For those who are not up for trekking but enjoy greenery and

Cheena Matir Pahar

hills, Netrokona is a perfect place to visit.

There are "tilas" in Durgapur, but our recommendation would be to visit Momin's Tila in Lengura, Kalmakanda. It is easy to climb, the large trees provide a beautiful ambience, and from the top, you can see larger hills in the distance. It is peaceful and far from the madding crowd!

Remember, Netrokona is no Cox's Bazar or Sylhet. You will surely find many tourists, but the number is much less compared to the more touristy areas of our country. Therefore, its beauty is still pristine, plus one can find themselves away from chaos.

"Country roads, take me home"

When we speak of scenic roads that offer a pleasant drive in Bangladesh, we usually think of the Marine Drive, the winding ways of Bandarban, etc. However, something that often does not get that much attention but deserves a lot is the roads through Kalmakanda.

In Kalmakanda, particularly in and around Lengura and Panchgaon, you are never far away from the beautiful scenery of larger hills on the horizon, against the backdrop of blue skies and white clouds, rising from the ground in all its splendour.

You do not need a destination; a carefree and fun ride with friends and family, and a suitable playlist in the background are enough to create memories that will last a lifetime!

Soaked in history

Mymensingh overall is obviously very rich in history, and Netrokona district surely has a fair share of it as well.

Not far from Momin's Tila, close to the border, is the Tomb of Seven Martyrs, more commonly known as "Saat Shohider Shomadhi". Surrounded by large trees, at the very edge of our country, lies a set of graves of freedom fighters that some of us perhaps do not even know of!

The site pays homage to seven valiant freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives in a historic battle that took place on 26 July, 1971, in Kalmakanda.

Scenic views at Kalmakanda

Someshwari River

On the other hand, back in Durgapur, one can visit the two memorials paying tribute to the Tonk Movement, a struggle that occurred around the end of the British colonial period.

Meanwhile, located in the Kendua upazila are the ruins of Ruailbari Fort, a site that is believed to be a military outpost from the Sultanate era. Thanks to the excavation works, it is now an archaeological site that will surely be of interest to history buffs.

A sweet treat

Last but not least, anyone visiting Netrokona town must visit Gayanath Mistanno Bhandar for its highly acclaimed balish mishti.

This pillow-shaped mishti is one of the glories of Netrokona. After enjoying over a century of popularity, the balish mishti has also recently earned the GI (Geographical Indication) tag.

This sweet is very much a part of the Netrokona culture. Celebrations like weddings call for Gayanath's balish sweets, which come in various sizes. The larger ones can even feed five people.

As one can understand, there is passion as well as pride among the locals regarding this delicacy. And so, if you are in Netrokona, this soft, sweet, pillow-shaped wonder that has survived the test of time is something you should definitely dig your teeth into.

Essentials

Netrokona is indeed not only about Birishiri and the China Clay Hills. It is so much more: a promise of spending a memorable time amidst nature, history, and delicious food!

One of the best ways to get there is by road (buses or, more comfortably, by car). From the Mymensingh district, you can make a day trip to Netrokona; it takes about 2.5 hours. Depending on your itinerary, a full day may suffice if you start off early.

There are a number of good hotels in Mymensingh city. Stay in one of those for a night, and return to Dhaka the next day, or perhaps go for another spot in the division.

Mymensingh division is dotted with numerous places of interest!

So, the next time you are planning a trip — especially if you are looking for a place that has yet to become crowded or too common — exploring Netrokona is perhaps what you are looking for.

Cheena Matir Pahar

A tila in Netrokona

Someshwari River

By M H Haider
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

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#LIFEHACKS

Stress-free Eid shopping guide for every family member

The most blessed time of the year is here again! How lucky are we to experience Ramadan again, to seek Allah's forgiveness, and His boundless mercy! May our hearts be purified, our souls nourished and filled with Allah's grace. Spreading joy and happiness all around is the greatest aspect of this Holy month, and what better way to do that than giving gifts that are heartfelt and intentional?

Speaking of gift giving, few other things can get as overwhelming for some! Even more so when one has to think of every family member, friend, colleague, neighbour — their likes, dislikes, practicality of the gift, budget — phew! Starting ahead is paramount; especially during major festive times like Eid. And it all begins with a list. Jotting down the names of people is a good way to start. Sort them out in groups of family members, and then make sub-groups like parents, in-laws, nieces and nephews, cousins, aunts, and so on. Get into as much detail as possible to save time and understand the task at hand.

Start early, like weeks ahead! It's even better to start a month prior too. That way, one can scour out the best possible options, and avail deals and offers as well. Stick to your list, keep your eyes peeled for things your friends and family might like and start purchasing, so as to get the best gifts. This method also spaces out purchases, making it less of a burden finance-wise, which is usually the case with panic bulk buying at the last minute!

Now let's get to the nitty gritty, shall we? For parents and in-laws, start with mapping out preferences. For Eid, apparel is usually the first and foremost choice for majority of families. And it's a great idea because it is the quintessential Eid gift, which pleases one and all. A smart panjabi for the men and saree or kameez for the ladies is a no-brainer. Visit boutiques or shops your parents and in-laws prefer early, to get the best picks during the festive season. Also, exchanges and returns are easiest towards the beginning of Ramadan, which are bound to happen!

Apart from the obvious gift of clothes, there's a whole bunch of other options. For tech-savvy parents, smartwatches or smartphones are a great gift. Religious books, comfortable prayer mats also are good options. Subscriptions are also gifts that keep on giving! It could be to a cooking class, understanding the Quran, or learning a new skill. Tickets for a vacation or staycation make for great gifts too. Find out what parents would love; choose something they are not likely to get for themselves and surprise them!

Siblings, cousins, and friends are easier to shop for, as they're most likely to let you know what they want! For the ladies, jewellery, perfume, books, luxury make up, and shoes make for splendid gifts. Gents prefer fashion accessories like belts, cool cufflinks, wallets, perfume, and video games too! Other fun things such as scented candles, home fragrance, and home wear are also fantastic gifts. You could choose one, or a curated collection of items.

For the foodie in your life, gourmet food baskets are perfect. You can pick and choose the items yourself, or there are many services that will happily create lovely Eid food gift baskets for you. Try to know what your friend likes and create a curated gift hamper. An amazing coffee hamper, filled with many kinds of coffee beans, mugs, coffee-flavoured snacks, and for that really special touch, a French press for a true coffee lover is the ultimate Eid gift, and will earn you the badge for best gift giver!

Can't decide what to get for that one picky cousin? A gift certificate is the perfect solution! A win-win for both sides, these certificates let the recipient choose their own gift! Subscriptions are also great; spa, men's salon, magazine, or food/tea or coffee supplies are a few ideas. This is a gift that will keep giving well beyond Eid season and remind them of your generosity for months! Lastly, always remember, cash is king! When all else fails cold, hard cash in a sweet little envelope, encased with a heartfelt message is surely going to make for the best gift this Eid!

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan
Photo: Collected