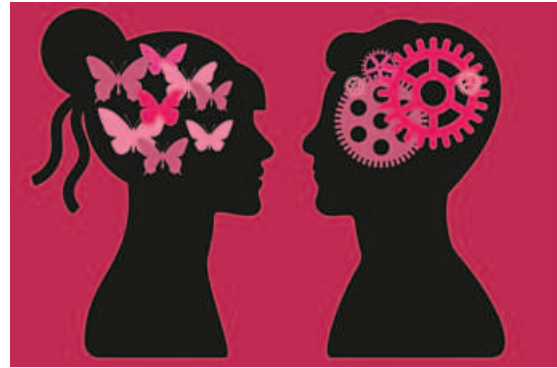


## Love, stress, and cortisol: the biological cost of narcissistic relationships

DR SUMAIYA KHALED

Love is often described as healing, yet not all relationships offer comfort. Emerging research suggests that being involved with individuals who display strong narcissistic traits can have measurable biological consequences, extending beyond emotional strain.

At the centre of this response is cortisol, commonly known as the body's primary stress hormone. In healthy relationships, emotional support helps regulate stress, keeping cortisol levels stable. However, relationships marked by manipulation, unpredictability, or emotional neglect can trigger chronic activation of the stress response system. Over time, this leads to persistently



elevated cortisol levels.

This prolonged stress can disrupt sleep, weaken immunity, and increase the risk of conditions such as anxiety and Depression. Individuals often report fatigue, irritability, and difficulty concentrating, even when they are unaware of the underlying cause. The body, in effect, begins to internalise relational stress.

What makes this dynamic particularly complex is its subtlety. Narcissistic relationships may not always appear overtly harmful. Moments of validation can be interspersed with criticism or withdrawal, creating a cycle that keeps individuals emotionally engaged while physiologically strained.

Understanding these effects reframes relationship health as a public health concern. Emotional environments are not just psychological spaces but biological ones, shaping how the body responds, adapts, and ultimately copes with stress over time.

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## NOT JUST TREATMENT, BUT TIMING: The real battle against cancer

DR ARMAN REZA CHOWDHURY

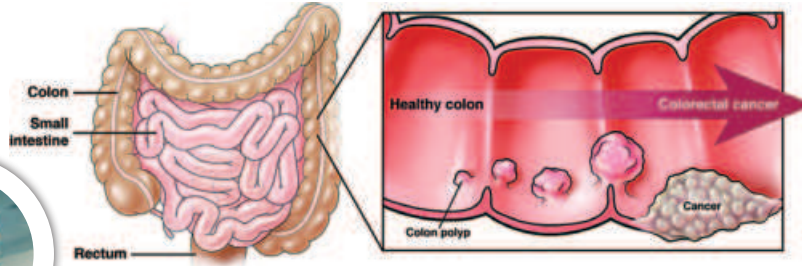
Colorectal cancer is quietly becoming a growing concern in Bangladesh. From busy city hospitals to smaller district centres, more people are being diagnosed every year. But rising numbers tell only part of the story. The deeper issue lies in whether people are receiving the right care at the right time, and whether that care is within reach for all.

Treatment today is no longer limited to surgery alone. Many patients require medicine that work throughout the body. These are used before surgery to shrink the disease, after surgery to prevent its return, or when it has already spread. This form of care is not a last resort but a central part of modern treatment.

Encouragingly, Bangladesh has made visible progress. In major hospitals, patients can now receive treatments similar to those offered internationally. Newer medicine have also entered practice in selected cases. Compared to the past, options have expanded, and doctors are more informed about global standards.

Yet, this progress is uneven. Advanced care is mostly concentrated in a few specialised centres, particularly in the capital. Patients living outside these areas often face limited choices. For them, where they live can determine the quality of care they receive. This gap creates a silent divide in outcomes.

Another pressing challenge is the lack of personalised care. Modern treatment increasingly depends on understanding the unique nature of each patient's illness. Certain tests help guide which medicine is likely to work best. However, in reality, many patients cannot access these tests. Some find them too expensive,



others face long delays, and in some areas they are simply unavailable. As a result, treatment decisions are often based on availability rather than suitability.

Cost remains one of the heaviest burdens. Most patients in Bangladesh pay for treatment from their own pockets. Even basic care can strain a family's finances. When newer or more advanced medicines are needed, the cost rises sharply. Many patients are forced to stop midway, delay starting, or choose less effective options. This financial pressure affects not just health, but the stability of entire families.

Good care also depends on teamwork. Ideally, patients should be guided by a group of specialists working together, ensuring a clear and coordinated plan. While some hospitals have begun to follow this approach, it is not yet standard across the country. Many patients still move from one place to another, facing

confusion and delays.

Despite these challenges, there is reason for hope. The medical field in Bangladesh is evolving. Younger doctors are more aware, discussions are more informed, and step by step, the system is improving. Facilities for better diagnosis are slowly expanding, laying the groundwork for more precise care in the future.

Bangladesh now stands at a turning point. The journey from basic treatment to more tailored care has begun, but it is not yet complete. The goal ahead is clear: to ensure that every patient, regardless of location or income, receives timely, appropriate, and effective treatment. Because in the end, the true measure of progress is not what is available, but what is accessible.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH The invisible epidemic of liver damage

A large European study has revealed that hidden liver damage is quietly present in the general population, often without any warning signs.

Researchers screened over 30,000 adults aged 40 and above across multiple countries and found that a notable portion had signs of hidden liver problems despite feeling well. About 7 in 100 people showed concerning results, while nearly 2 in 100 were confirmed to have ongoing liver damage.



The strongest links were not surprising but deeply concerning. Excess body weight, diabetes, and regular alcohol intake were the key drivers behind this hidden condition. Most cases were tied to fat build-up in the liver, a problem increasingly common with modern lifestyles.

What makes this issue alarming is its quiet nature. Many people remain unaware until the condition worsens. Early checks and lifestyle changes, however, could stop it from progressing into serious illness, offering a crucial window to protect long-term health.



## From playground to paycheque: how early weight shapes adult life

A child's early years often shape more than just memories. A new research suggests they may also shape futures from classrooms to careers and even financial stability later in life.

Presented at the European Congress on Obesity 2026, the study followed over 130,000 individuals across several decades. It found a striking pattern: children who lived with excess weight were more likely to face challenges in education, employment and earnings as adults.

The findings paint a quiet but powerful picture. Children with higher body weight were found to complete fewer months of schooling compared to their peers. While the difference may seem small at first glance, it reflects a broader ripple effect; one that continues into adulthood.

By midlife, these early differences appear to widen. Women who had excess weight in childhood were significantly more likely to be outside the workforce by the age of 50. Interestingly, this pattern did not appear in men.

However, when it came to income, the story shifted. Men who had lived with excess weight as children faced a sharper drop in earnings compared to women. In simple terms, while women were

more likely to step away from work, men who stayed employed often earned less.

Another layer adds depth to these findings. The impact was strongest among those from more educated families. This suggests that social expectations and pressures may play a hidden role. In environments where achievement is highly valued, children who stand out physically may also face subtle barriers that affect confidence, opportunities and long-term outcomes.

The research does not point to a single cause. Instead, it highlights a complex mix of social attitudes, opportunities and life experiences that unfold over time. What begins as a childhood condition may quietly influence how individuals move through school, enter the workforce and navigate adulthood.

At its heart, the message is clear yet understated. Childhood health is not just about the present moment. It carries echoes into the future, shaping paths in ways that are not always visible but deeply felt.

As conversations around child health continue to grow, this study adds a compelling reminder. Supporting children today may mean opening doors for them tomorrow; not just in health, but in education, work and life itself.

## Global meningitis death toll remains alarming despite progress

More than 250,000 people died from meningitis worldwide in 2023, with children under five accounting for over one-third of the deaths, according to a major global study published in The Lancet Neurology. The research estimates 2.5 million infections that year, highlighting a persistent public health challenge despite decades of progress.

Although mortality and infection rates have declined since 1990, experts warn progress



remains too slow to meet World Health Organisation targets of sharply reducing cases and deaths by 2030. Meningitis continues to be the leading infectious cause of neurological disability globally.

Low birthweight, premature birth and air pollution were identified as key risk factors. The burden is highest in low-income countries, particularly within Africa's meningitis belt, where nations such as Nigeria, Chad and Niger report the greatest impact.

Researchers stress that expanding vaccination programmes, improving access to care, strengthening diagnostics and ensuring responsible antibiotic use are critical to reducing deaths and preventing long-term complications from this life-threatening disease.

## WORLD IMMUNISATION WEEK 2026

# Protection for all: Why vaccines must reach everyone, everywhere

STAR HEALTH DESK

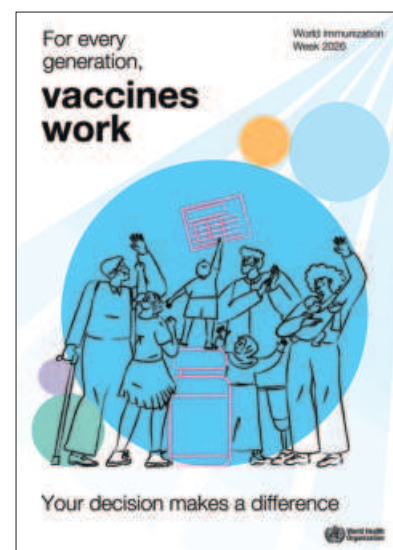
Every year, as April draws to a close, the world pauses to recognise the quiet power of protection. From 24 to 30 April, World Immunisation Week shines a spotlight on one of humanity's simplest yet most powerful shields: vaccines.

Led by the World Health Organisation (WHO), this global observance is more than a campaign. It is a reminder that protection is not a privilege but a shared responsibility. Vaccines, often taken for granted, have transformed lives across generations, saving millions from illnesses that once claimed countless lives.

Yet, the message this year is clear and urgent: *protection must reach everyone, everywhere.*

Across the globe, communities continue to face gaps in access. While some children grow up shielded from preventable diseases, others remain vulnerable due to lack of awareness, access, or trust. World Immunisation Week calls for collective action to bridge these gaps, ensuring no one is left behind.

Vaccines are not just about individual safety. They protect families, strengthen communities, and safeguard entire nations.



When more people are vaccinated, the spread of disease slows down, creating a ripple effect of protection that benefits even the most vulnerable.

The World Health Organisation works closely with countries to support these efforts. From raising awareness to guiding governments and helping improve vaccination programmes, its role is central in making sure protection reaches those who need it most. But success does

not depend on global bodies alone. It depends on local action, community trust, and informed choices.

In many parts of the world, simple steps such as timely vaccination can mean the difference between life and loss. Parents, caregivers, and communities play a crucial role in ensuring children receive the protection they deserve. At the same time, adults are reminded that vaccines are not just for childhood. Protection is a lifelong journey.

This week is also a moment to celebrate progress. Diseases that once spread fear have been reduced or even eliminated in many regions, thanks to sustained vaccination efforts. These achievements stand as proof of what is possible when science, policy, and people come together.

Still, the journey is far from over. The World Immunisation Week urges everyone to act, to learn, and to support. Because in a world where health risks can cross borders in moments, protection must be shared, not selective. The goal is simple yet powerful: a future where more people, and their communities, live healthier, safer lives, protected from preventable harm.

Source: World Health Organisation



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