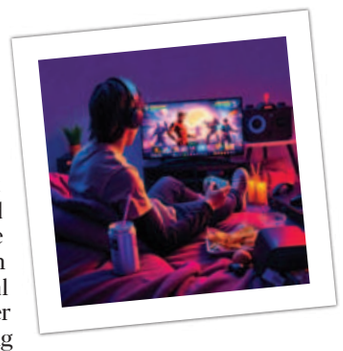
Can the right video game help tackle loneliness? The answer may surprise you.

STAR HEALTH DESK



Video games have long been blamed for keeping people indoors, but new research suggests the right kind of game could actually become part of the solution to severe social isolation. Rather than encouraging withdrawal, carefully designed games may help people reconnect with others and gradually rebuild confidence.

Researchers surveyed 529 adults in Japan who regularly play video games to understand what people at greater risk of long-term social withdrawal enjoy most in gaming. Surprisingly, they found that favourite game genres were largely similar regardless of a person's level of isolation. The difference lay in how people preferred to play and what they hoped to gain from the experience.

Those who were more socially withdrawn showed a stronger preference for story-rich adventures, thoughtful strategy, and games that encourage teamwork rather than competition. Many also reported unpleasant experiences with hostile online players, making them more likely to favour supportive, cooperative play instead of confrontational matches. The findings suggest that games with engaging stories, memorable characters, simple controls and shorter playing sessions may offer a more welcoming space. Players also appreciated relaxing tasks, a sense of gradual progress and the freedom to play at their own pace. These features may provide comfort without adding pressure, while encouraging small but meaningful social interactions.

Researchers also recommend limiting toxic behaviour in online communities and rewarding kindness and cooperation. Some games that encourage players to explore their neighbourhoods could even motivate people to spend more time outdoors and meet others naturally.

The authors stress that games are not a replacement for professional support. Excessive gaming can create its own problems. Instead, they believe thoughtfully designed games could become a gentle stepping stone, helping isolated people regain confidence, form positive connections and, eventually, re-engage with the world beyond the screen.

GLOBAL STANDARDS in healthcare could reshape Bangladesh's future

DR MD ABU KAWSAR SHAPON





Every year, thousands of Bangladeshis leave the country in search of medical care they believe they cannot find at home. Their journeys often begin with hope but come at an enormous financial cost, draining billions of dollars from the national economy. While this trend highlights gaps in healthcare, it also reveals an opportunity that Bangladesh can no longer afford to ignore.

The country has made remarkable progress in expanding healthcare services over the years, reaching millions who once had limited access to treatment. Yet many families still choose hospitals in neighbouring countries because they trust the quality of care, modern facilities and overall patient experience more than what they expect locally.

According to available estimates, between 450,000 and 800,000 Bangladeshis travel overseas each year for treatment. Their combined spending is believed to reach almost US$5 billion annually. If even a large share of that money remained within the country, it could strengthen hospitals, create jobs and stimulate wider economic growth.

Improving healthcare, however, is about much more than constructing impressive buildings. Patients also expect timely treatment, reliable equipment, clean surroundings and respectful communication. Confidence is built when people feel safe, informed and cared for throughout their journey, from diagnosis to recovery.

Emergency transport is another area demanding urgent attention. Patients in critical condition often lose valuable time travelling between districts in search of specialised treatment. Faster ambulance services, better coordination and improved emergency response could save countless lives while strengthening public trust in the healthcare system.

Modern healthcare also depends on organised record keeping, better use of digital tools and continuous learning among healthcare workers. Equally important is kindness. A reassuring conversation, clear explanations and compassionate care can shape a patient's experience just as much as medicines or machines.

Experts believe Bangladesh could become a destination for international patients if the country invests wisely, raises service standards and promotes itself with confidence. Such progress would not only reduce the need for Bangladeshis to seek treatment abroad but could also attract visitors from neighbouring nations, creating a new source of national income.

Achieving this vision will require cooperation between the government, private hospitals and healthcare professionals. Encouraging local innovation, supporting research and ensuring fair access to quality care should become national priorities. Long-term planning, rather than short-term fixes, will determine whether Bangladesh can compete with established regional healthcare destinations.

The country has already demonstrated that determined reforms can transform important sectors. Healthcare deserves the same ambition. By investing in quality, trust and patient-centred services, Bangladesh has the chance to keep more families at home during their most difficult moments while opening the door to a stronger economy. Better healthcare is no longer only a public service; it is an investment in the nation's future.

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Beauty beyond the mirror

DR SUMAIYA KHALED



Smooth skin, fuller lips and sharper features have become more common than ever. Social media filters, celebrity culture and constant exposure to polished faces have made aesthetic treatments seem almost ordinary. While many people choose these procedures to feel more confident, experts warn that the growing trend also raises questions about how we see ourselves.

The desire to improve one's appearance is not new. What has changed is the pressure to meet increasingly narrow beauty ideals. Endless scrolling through edited images can make ordinary faces appear inadequate, leading some people to believe they must change their looks to feel accepted.

For many, aesthetic treatments bring genuine satisfaction and help restore confidence after illness, injury or personal insecurity. Yet when self-worth depends entirely on appearance, confidence can become fragile. The pursuit of perfection often shifts the goalposts, leaving people wanting just one more change.

Mental wellbeing thrives when confidence comes from more than the reflection in a mirror. Healthy relationships, personal achievements, kindness and self-acceptance all shape lasting self-respect.

As aesthetic treatments continue to rise in popularity, the real challenge is not deciding whether to alter our appearance, but ensuring our value is never measured solely by it. Beauty may attract attention, but self-respect sustains confidence.

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What if the loudest threat to our health isn't audible?

From quieter streets to mindful habits, small actions can create healthier cities for everyone.

DR B A SADIQ



The modern city rarely pauses. From the first rush of morning traffic to the late-night hum of construction, generators and crowded streets, noise has become the soundtrack of everyday life. Many people accept it as the price of progress, yet this constant roar carries a hidden cost that often goes unnoticed. What surrounds us every day is not simply sound—it is a growing threat to our health and happiness.

Unlike many other distractions, noise cannot simply be switched off by the mind. Even when people believe they have become used to it, the body continues to react. Constant exposure keeps us on edge, making it harder to relax, focus or enjoy moments of peace. Over time, this can lead to tiredness, irritability and difficulty concentrating, affecting both work and personal life.

Children are among those who suffer the most. A noisy environment can make it harder for them to read, learn and stay attentive in the classroom. Adults are not spared either. Busy workplaces filled with constant background noise often see reduced productivity and more mistakes, while homes lose their role as places of comfort and rest.

The impact extends beyond mental wellbeing. Long-term exposure to loud surroundings has been linked to hearing problems, disturbed sleep and an increased risk of several long-lasting health conditions. Poor sleep alone can weaken the body, reduce energy and affect overall quality of life, creating a cycle that is difficult to break.

For cities like Dhaka, the challenge is especially urgent. Heavy traffic, unnecessary honking, construction work and loudspeakers often push noise levels far beyond what is considered safe. Although laws exist to control excessive noise, weak enforcement and limited public awareness continue to allow the problem to grow.

Creating quieter communities does not require silence everywhere. It begins with small but meaningful changes, such as avoiding unnecessary honking, following construction rules, respecting quiet hours and designing neighbourhoods with people's wellbeing in mind. Stronger policies and greater public awareness must work hand in hand.

A peaceful environment is more than a luxury. It allows people to think clearly, sleep better, learn effectively and connect with one another. As cities continue to grow, protecting moments of calm may become one of the simplest yet most powerful investments we can make for healthier, happier lives and future generations.

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Turning the tide on drowning

A simple roadmap to reduce drowning through safer communities, better awareness and stronger preparedness.

Every year, nearly 300,000 people lose their lives to drowning, making it one of the world's most overlooked yet preventable causes of death. Children aged between five and 14 are among those most at risk, while more than 90 per cent of deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Rivers, ponds, lakes, wells, household water containers and swimming pools all become dangerous when safety measures are absent. Climate change is adding to the threat as floods, storms and rising temperatures increase people's exposure to water hazards.

Ahead of World Drowning Prevention Day, which is July 25, the World Health Organisation unveiled "PROTECT", a package of seven practical actions designed to help countries save lives. The approach focuses on creating safer places around water, improving rescue skills, protecting people who work on or near water, making water transport safer, teaching children swimming and water safety, strengthening childcare and supervision, and preparing communities for floods and other emergencies. Rather than relying on a single solution, PROTECT encourages governments, schools, families and local communities to work together.

Experts say every drowning is a tragedy that can often be prevented. By turning proven ideas into everyday action, countries can reduce needless deaths and protect future generations. The message is clear: preventing drowning begins long before anyone enters the water; with awareness, preparation and collective responsibility.

When hidden stones strike from within

DR M A KARIM



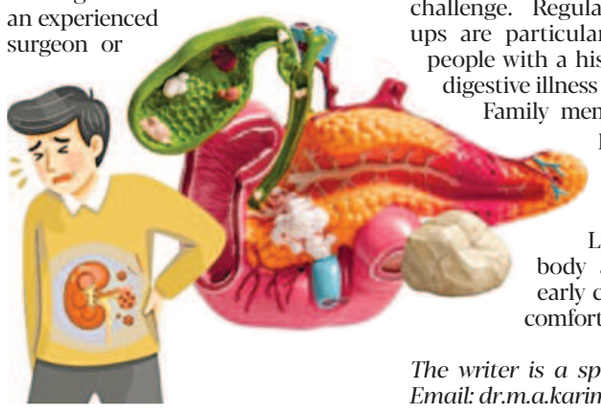
Most people have heard of kidney stones or gallstones, but few realise that stones can also develop in the pancreas. Although the thought sounds alarming, specialists say there is no reason to panic because timely treatment can prevent serious problems. The real danger lies not in the condition itself, but in ignoring persistent warning signs.

These stones form when hard deposits build up inside the small passage that carries digestive juices from the pancreas. Once that pathway becomes blocked, the body struggles to digest food properly, leading to discomfort that often worsens over time. Severe pain in the upper abdomen, pain spreading to the back, repeated vomiting, unexplained weight loss and yellowing of the eyes or skin should never be dismissed as ordinary stomach trouble.

Long-standing inflammation of the pancreas remains the biggest risk factor. Heavy alcohol use can increase the likelihood by damaging the organ over many years. In some people, gallstones may trigger the problem, while others inherit a greater tendency because of their family history.

The encouraging news is that modern care has transformed the outlook for people living with this condition. Doctors can now identify the problem through appropriate tests and recommend treatment that suits the size and position of the stones. Early medical attention often relieves pain, restores normal digestion and helps prevent further damage.

Health experts also urge people to avoid self-medication or relying on home remedies when symptoms continue. Painkillers may briefly mask discomfort, but they do not remove the underlying blockage. Seeking advice from an experienced surgeon or specialist remains the safest course of action.



The message is simple: do not ignore persistent abdominal pain, especially when it is accompanied by vomiting, digestive difficulties or sudden weight loss. While pancreatic stones are less common than other forms of stones, they are treatable when recognised early. Prompt diagnosis, sensible lifestyle choices and professional medical care can make all the difference. Rather than fearing the condition, people should focus on recognising the warning signs and acting without delay. Awareness, not anxiety, is the strongest defence, reminding us that early action often turns a frightening diagnosis into a manageable health challenge. Regular health check-ups are particularly important for people with a history of long-term digestive illness or heavy drinking. Family members should also pay attention if symptoms keep returning instead of disappearing. Listening to the body and seeking help early can protect health, comfort alike.

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