

# Too hot to handle: staying safe as temperatures rise

Extreme heat is no longer just an uncomfortable part of summer. As the planet warms, longer and harsher heatwaves are quietly becoming a serious threat to health, work and everyday life.

Between 2000 and 2019, an estimated 489,000 heat-related deaths occurred worldwide each year, with 45 per cent in Asia. Deaths linked to heat among people aged over 65 also rose by about 85 per cent between 2000–2004 and 2017–2021.

The danger begins when the body struggles to cool itself. Prolonged exposure can lead to exhaustion or heatstroke, while placing extra strain on the heart and kidneys. Hot weather can also worsen existing heart, lung and blood sugar problems. Heatstroke is an emergency and can be fatal.

Some people face greater risks than others. Older adults, children, outdoor and manual workers, athletes, people living with long-term illnesses and those in poorly ventilated homes are particularly vulnerable. Low-income communities may face even greater exposure because good housing and cooling are often out of reach.

Extreme heat can ripple far beyond individual illness. Hospitals may see sudden increases in patients, while power cuts can disrupt healthcare, transport and water supplies. Productivity falls, accidents become more likely, and schools or workplaces may struggle to function.

Simple precautions can make a difference. Avoid strenuous outdoor activity during the hottest hours, seek shade and spend time in a cool place. Keep homes cooler by blocking direct sunlight during the day and opening windows after dark when outside temperatures fall. Wear loose, light clothing, take cool showers and drink water regularly.

Children and animals should never be left in parked vehicles, even briefly. Check regularly on older relatives, neighbours and anyone living alone. Official heat warnings should be taken seriously, because illness can develop quickly.

Heat-related harm is largely preventable. As heatwaves become more frequent, staying informed and prepared may be one of the simplest ways to protect lives.

***Source:*** *World Health Organisation*

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

# Breastfeeding begins with a mother—but succeeds with a system

## Countries urged to strengthen breastfeeding support and health systems to give every child a healthy start in life

**STAR HEALTH DESK**

As World Breastfeeding Week is observed from August 1–7, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF have renewed a simple but urgent message: ***countries must stop treating breastfeeding as a mother's responsibility alone and start building health systems, workplaces and communities that make it possible.***

The call comes with encouraging news. Globally, the share of babies receiving only breast milk during their first six months has risen from about 37 per cent in 2012 to more than 47 per cent today. Breastfeeding up to two years has also increased, from 38 per cent to 50 per cent over the past five years.

But averages can hide gaps. Support remains weaker in poorer countries, crisis-hit communities and places where mothers struggle to reach reliable health services. WHO and UNICEF estimate that expanding breastfeeding could prevent nearly 400,000 child deaths and about 140,000 maternal deaths every year.

For Bangladesh, the message deserves attention. UNICEF's latest country data show that 56.6 per cent of infants under six months are exclusively breastfed. This is progress, but it also means a substantial number of babies are still missing the recommended start.

The problem is not simply whether mothers know breastfeeding is beneficial. A mother may leave a maternity ward without enough practical guidance, face pressure to introduce formula, return to a workplace without privacy to feed or express milk, or receive conflicting advice from relatives and health workers. In such circumstances, telling women to "breastfeed more" shifts the burden onto the very people who need support.

Bangladesh therefore needs to look beyond awareness campaigns.



Every maternity facility should ensure that mothers receive hands-on help soon after birth and know where to seek assistance once they return home. Frontline workers should give clear, consistent advice rather than leaving families to navigate myths, advertising and social pressure alone.

Workplaces are another missing link. A clean private room, reasonable feeding breaks, safe milk storage, flexible return-to-work arrangements and childcare nearby can determine whether a working mother continues breastfeeding. These should not be viewed as generous extras. They are practical investments in the health of families and the future workforce.

Protection from aggressive formula marketing matters too. Earlier UNICEF findings in Bangladesh showed that mothers can be influenced by recommendations for formula products, including advice coming through health professionals. Families deserve information shaped by a baby's needs, not commercial interests.

The 2026 World Breastfeeding Week theme, "Breastfeeding for a Sustainable Start in Life: Strengthen What Works", is therefore timely. Evidence already points towards what helps: trained support, community counselling, paid maternity leave, breastfeeding-friendly workplaces and safeguards against misleading promotion.

Breast milk may be natural, but successful breastfeeding does not always happen naturally. It often requires time, confidence, skilled help and an environment that protects a mother's choice.

Bangladesh has made gains. The next step is to turn breastfeeding support from a message into an everyday service; from delivery room to home, community and workplace.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

# *A calmer life may be closer than you think*

**AISHI DASTIDAR**



Stress has quietly become one of the most common companions of modern life. A little pressure can sharpen our focus before an exam, help us meet deadlines or encourage us to perform better. Yet when that pressure refuses to leave, it begins to take a silent toll on both body and mind.

Many people dismiss ongoing stress as simply being part of a busy routine. Over time, however, it can steal restful sleep, trigger frequent headaches, leave muscles aching and make even simple tasks feel overwhelming. It can also drain motivation, affect relationships and reduce enjoyment in everyday moments.

The effects often stretch beyond personal wellbeing. Persistent stress can lower productivity at work, increase mistakes and make social interactions feel exhausting. If ignored for too long, it may also raise the risk of developing serious long-term health problems, particularly when paired with poor lifestyle habits.

The encouraging news is that stress does not have to control our lives. Recognising the warning signs early, taking regular breaks, staying active, talking to trusted people and maintaining healthy daily routines can make a remarkable difference.

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, but it should never become a permanent way of living. Managing it early is one of the simplest investments in a healthier future.

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# Her reproductive future may begin at six—what families should know

**STAR HEALTH REPORT**

A girl's weight during childhood may influence more than her health at the time. It could also be linked to her chances of becoming a mother later in life.

Researchers in Denmark followed more than 60,000 women, using their weight and height records from childhood and tracking whether they gave birth between the ages of 18 and 45.

They found that women who had lived with overweight or obesity as children were less likely to give birth as adults than those whose childhood weight remained around average. The difference began to appear from their mid-20s and became more noticeable in their 30s.

This does not mean that a girl who is overweight will necessarily experience fertility problems. The study found a connection, but it did not prove that childhood weight directly causes childlessness. A woman's weight in adulthood and many other health and personal circumstances may also influence whether she becomes a parent.

Still, the findings suggest that supporting healthy growth should begin early. The answer is not to shame children or place unnecessary pressure on them because of their appearance. Instead, families and communities can help children develop healthier habits by making nutritious food and regular physical activity easier to access.

Helping girls grow up in a supportive and healthy environment may benefit not only their wellbeing today, but also their reproductive health in the future.

***Source:*** *JAMA Network Open*





# Pain in every step: Simple ways to protect your legs

**DR M EASIN ALI**

A short walk should not feel like a test of endurance. Yet for many people, pain begins after only a few minutes on their feet; perhaps as a cramp, burning feeling, tingling, numbness or a sharp ache. While it is tempting to blame tiredness, repeated leg pain during walking deserves attention.

One of the simplest explanations is an overworked muscle. A long walk, sudden increase in exercise or starting activity without warming up can strain the legs, particularly when the body is not used to the extra effort.



Sometimes, however, the problem begins in the foot. Irritation of the strong band of tissue along the sole can trigger heel or sole pain, often at its worst during the first steps after waking or after sitting for a long time. Walking may then make the discomfort stronger.

Ageing joints can also turn everyday movement into a struggle. Wear and tear in the knees or ankles may cause aching and stiffness while walking, climbing stairs or standing for extended periods.

Not every painful leg starts with the leg itself. Pain may travel from the lower back through the hip and downwards, sometimes bringing numbness, tingling or weakness. Another warning pattern is pain that appears during walking but eases after resting. This can happen when narrowed blood vessels limit the flow of blood to the legs and should not be brushed aside.

Relief depends on finding the reason behind the pain. For a severe short-term strain, rest may help, while an ice pack applied for 15 to 20 minutes two or three times daily can ease discomfort. Gentle stretching and strengthening, particularly of the calf muscles, may also improve movement.

Shoes matter more than many realise. Comfortable, supportive footwear that fits properly can reduce unnecessary strain, while maintaining a healthy weight can lessen pressure on the legs and joints. Medicines for pain should be used under medical guidance. Persistent problems may need physiotherapy and guided exercises.

Prevention begins with everyday habits: regular light exercise, stretching, good posture and warming up before activity. Sudden bursts of excessive walking or running are best avoided, as is standing for very long periods without a break.

Most importantly, do not make a habit of walking through recurring pain. When discomfort keeps returning, becomes severe or refuses to improve, finding its cause early can protect mobility and help keep every step comfortable and preserve an active daily life.

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# When '*staying strong*' starts hurting your health

**SRINJOYA JUNAN**



*"Don't cry." "Stay strong." "Move on."* These familiar words are often meant to comfort us. Yet when strength becomes a habit of hiding sadness, anger or fear, the feelings may not simply vanish. They can linger beneath the surface, while the body continues to carry the strain.

Suppressing emotion means deliberately pushing a feeling aside, covering it with a smile, distracting yourself or refusing to admit it is there. At times, keeping composure is necessary. The concern begins when bottling things up becomes a way of life.

One 12-year US study followed nearly 730 adults and found that people who regularly suppressed emotions had a 35 per cent higher risk of dying from any cause during the study period. Cancer deaths were also higher among those who suppressed more. However, researchers have found different patterns in some cultures, reminding us that emotional expression is shaped by society and context.

The body may offer part of the explanation. Studies in stressful situations show that people asked to hide their emotions can experience stronger physical stress responses, including faster heartbeats and higher blood pressure. Even when someone looks



perfectly calm, their body may still be behaving as though it is under threat. If that strain becomes constant, it may gradually take a toll.

The mind can suffer too. Habitually holding feelings in has been linked with anxiety, low mood and poorer overall wellbeing. This does not mean every emotion must be announced to everyone. Healthy expression is not the same as uncontrolled expression; it is about giving feelings somewhere safe to go.

That outlet can be surprisingly simple. In a well-known study, students wrote about upsetting experiences for just 15 minutes a day over four days. In the following six months, they made roughly half as many visits to their student health centre as students who wrote about ordinary topics.

For everyday life, the message is straightforward: feeling something is not a failure of strength. Talk to someone you trust. Write privately in a journal. Seek professional support when needed. Or simply pause long enough to name what you are feeling safely.

A brave face can help us through a difficult moment. But wearing it permanently may come at a hidden price. Sometimes, real resilience begins not by silencing an emotion, but by finally allowing it to be heard.

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