NEVIAN | The Daily Star

ADVANCING DIABETES PREVENTION and Care in Bangladesh

A roundtable titled "World Diabetes Day 2026: Acting Early to Prevent Diabetes and Improve Care in Bangladesh" was held on 28 October 2026 to mark World Diabetes Day. Jointly organised by Nevian Lifesciences and The Daily Star, the discussion brought together leading diabetologists, endocrinologists and relevant healthcare experts to examine the growing diabetes burden in Bangladesh. The dialogue focused on early detection, preventive measures, public awareness, accessible screening, affordable treatment, and improved long-term patient care, highlighting the need for coordinated action to strengthen diabetes prevention and management nationwide.



DR AK AZAD KHAN
National Professor
BIRDEM General Hospital

Diabetes is a growing global public health challenge, but prevention and effective management can significantly reduce its impact. Early diagnosis, lifestyle changes and proper care are essential to help people with diabetes lead healthy, normal lives. Although Type 1 diabetes accounts for less than 5% of diabetes cases in Bangladesh, access to insulin remains a fundamental right, as it is essential for survival. Therefore, uninterrupted and affordable insulin supply should be recognised as both a citizens' right and a government responsibility. Furthermore, prevention requires effective public awareness strategies. Research in Bangladesh has demonstrated the potential of faith-based communication, particularly through mosque sermons, to promote diabetes prevention at a relatively low cost. Early intervention around marriage may also help prevent gestational diabetes, with initial research indicating a possible 45% reduction. Alongside these efforts, achieving WHO-defined essential healthcare is possible within the existing budget through appropriate government initiatives, stronger health services and wider public awareness.



PROF. DR MD. FARUQUE PATHAN
Professor of Endocrinology, Senior Director, Research & Academy
BIRDEM General Hospital

Prediabetes is a stage between normal blood sugar levels and diabetes, often developing without noticeable symptoms. With an estimated 1.39 crore adults in Bangladesh living with diabetes, early risk assessment and regular screening are essential. Nearly 30–40% of people at the impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) stage may already have complications, while around 50% of patients diagnosed after five to six years may present complications. Excess weight, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, stress, and changing urban lifestyles further increase the risk. Therefore, screening should be prioritized for adults aged 35 and above, particularly those with obesity, family history or high blood pressure. Evidence shows that losing 5–7% of body weight and at least 150 minutes of brisk walking weekly significantly reduce diabetes risk. Community-based awareness, lifestyle counselling and regular follow-up should be expanded. Identify prediabetes early through screening if having strong risk factors. If diagnosed, take action through lifestyle modifications to prevent its progression. Early action can prevent complications and reduce the growing social and economic burden of diabetes.



DR FAZILA TUN NESA MALIK
Professor of Cardiology & Chief Consultant
National Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Institute

Diabetes significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular complications, making heart disease a leading cause of illness and death among diabetic patients. By 2030, an estimated 10.3% of the global population will be living with diabetes. People with diabetes face two to four times higher lifetime risk of developing heart disease, while uncontrolled diabetes increases the risk of death from heart complications eightfold. Elevated blood glucose damages blood vessels, promotes harmful cholesterol deposits and causes blockages that can lead to heart attacks. Moreover, diabetes can damage the nerves regulating heart function, resulting in irregular heartbeat, palpitations and potentially life-threatening complications. It can also weaken and stiffen the heart muscle, eventually leading to heart failure. Therefore, early detection, particularly at the prediabetes stage, regular screening and proper diabetes management are essential. Timely treatment and awareness can help prevent cardiovascular complications, while early intervention remains important for better treatment outcomes.



DR. FARIA AFSANA
Associate Professor and Head, Department of Endocrinology
BIRDEM General Hospital
President, Bangladesh Endocrine Society

Identifying individual risk factors and determining who needs screening is essential for early diabetes prevention. For adults over eighteen with no initial risks, screening is recommended every three years starting at age thirty-five. However, individuals with risk factors such as obesity, physical inactivity, hypertension, high cholesterol, hormonal disorders like hypothyroidism or polycystic ovary syndrome, a history of gestational diabetes, or prediabetes require annual screening. Meanwhile, children experiencing overweight alongside additional risks like a family history of diabetes, maternal gestational diabetes, or hormonal conditions should begin screening around age ten or puberty. Furthermore, anyone exhibiting classic symptoms such as excessive thirst, frequent urination, constant hunger, unexplained weight loss, or fatigue must be screened immediately. Screening relies primarily on the oral glucose tolerance test, alongside fasting blood sugar or HbA1c measurements. Ultimately, recognizing these risk factors and maintaining regular check-ups ensures timely diagnosis and better health outcomes.

About Nevian Lifescience PLC.

Nevian's heritage in Bangladesh dates back to 1973, when the company began operations as Ciba-Geigy (Bangladesh) Limited, a joint venture with Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), representing the Government of Bangladesh. Following the global merger of Ciba and Sandoz, the company subsequently became Novartis (Bangladesh) Limited. In 2026, following the acquisition of a majority stake by Radiant Pharmaceuticals Limited, the company was renamed Nevian Lifescience PLC.

Under its new identity, Nevian Lifescience PLC continues to locally manufacture Novartis' and Sandoz's global brands under license, with same ingredients, following the same manufacturing processes and adhering to the same global quality standards at the same facility, while serving as their authorized importation, marketing and distribution partner in Bangladesh.





DR MA SAMAD
Chief Executive Officer & Consultant Endocrinologist
National Healthcare Network, Bangladesh

The National Healthcare Network (NHN) under the Bangladesh Diabetic Association, operates eight hospitals and 22 centres across the country to diabetes and other healthcare services closer to communities. Through diagnosis, screening, awareness campaigns and treatment, the network served nearly 500,000 people last year, averaging 42,000 patients monthly. In addition, its Kazi Programme encourages couples to undergo diabetes and prediabetes risk assessments before marriage registration, offering tests at an affordable cost of Tk 600. Nationwide screening initiatives also focus on early detection and identifying individuals at risk. As nearly 50% of people with diabetes remain unaware of their condition, achieving global targets of diagnosing 80% of diabetes cases and bringing the diagnosed patients under control is essential. Furthermore, cardiovascular risk management requires appropriate statin use, while all people with Type 1 diabetes should have access to insulin. Through affordable and free treatment options, supported by cross-financing and government collaboration, healthcare access can be strengthened.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement regular diabetes and pre-diabetes screening starting at age 35 for adults, or from age 10/puberty for children with risk factors, to enable early detection
- Adopt healthier habits including reducing carbohydrate intake, eating balanced meals, engaging in physical activity, and reducing screen time to prevent Type 2 diabetes and fatty liver disease
- Recognize insulin as an absolute necessity for life and advocate for it as a basic human right and a mandatory government obligation for all Type 1 diabetes patients
- Screen women during booking visits and pre-marital or early pregnancy stages to effectively manage gestational diabetes and prevent adverse maternal and fetal complications
- Manage diabetes comprehensively by targeting not only blood glucose but also blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and associated conditions like fatty liver disease
- Utilize community-level platforms, such as religious leaders and mosques during sermons, to effectively spread public health messages and lifestyle education across the country
- Increase government involvement and financial support to make long-term diabetes care, diagnostics, and dialysis services accessible and affordable



PROF. DR. SHAMIM AHMED
Professor of Nephrology
Kidney Foundation Hospital & Research Institute
Ex-Director, National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology

Diabetes has become the leading cause of chronic kidney disease, accounting for 60% of dialysis patients today. This epidemic is fueled by modern lifestyles, including obesity, lack of physical activity, fast food, and excessive screen time. Furthermore, kidney damage can progress silently without heavy protein loss, making early detection vital. Simple, affordable tests such as microalbumin checks, blood pressure monitoring, ultrasound scans, and basic urine evaluations cost very little and can detect early kidney impairment. Identifying issues early allows modern medications to reverse damage and delay end-stage renal failure, preventing the catastrophic financial ruin families facing from dialysis or transplants. Beyond diabetes, hypertension, Glomerular nephritis, urinary tract obstructions, and the overuse of painkillers or unregulated medicines also contribute to kidney damage. Finally, early detection of kidney disease is vital to prevent or slow its progression. Without timely diagnosis and proper management kidney disease may progress to end stage renal disease.



PROF. DR. SHAIKH ZINNAT ARA NASREEN
Professor and Head, Department of Gynecology & Obstetrics
ZH Sikder Medical College Hospital
Vice President, OGSB

Gestational diabetes significantly affects pregnancy outcomes by causing severe complications for both mother and child. Placental hormones can interfere with insulin function, triggering hyperglycemia and excessive fetal growth known as macrosomia. This leads to shoulder dystocia, obstructed labor, birth injuries etc. Newborns face risks of hypoglycemia, sepsis, hyperbilirubinemia, hyperviscosity syndrome, and long-term predisposition to cardiovascular disease and diabetes in adulthood. Uncontrolled early diabetes can cause congenital birth defects, miscarriages, or preterm births, while putting mothers at risk of recurrent infections, preeclampsia, PPH, and ketoacidosis. Mitigating these risks requires proactive screening, ideally before conception or during early booking visits, followed by testing around 24 to 28 weeks. Recognizing high-risk factors, such as obesity, polycystic ovary syndrome, or family history, ensures timely intervention. Ultimately, raising awareness, adopting preventive strategies, and maintaining proper blood sugar control protect maternal health and secure safe pregnancy outcomes.



DR. SHAHJADA SELIM
Associate Professor of Endocrinology, Bangladesh Medical University
President Elect, Bangladesh Endocrine Society

Diabetes management must go beyond lowering blood sugar. Many patients are diagnosed and receive medication, yet their blood sugar, weight, blood pressure and cholesterol remain uncontrolled. The key challenge is to recognise diabetes as a complex metabolic disease involving insulin resistance, obesity, high blood pressure, abnormal blood lipids and chronic inflammation. Together, these factors increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney failure and nerve damage. Early and comprehensive treatment is essential. Evidence on the "legacy effect" shows that achieving good control soon after diagnosis can reduce long-term complications, while years of poor control make recovery more difficult. Modern medicines offer benefits beyond blood sugar management by protecting the heart and kidneys and supporting weight loss. Alongside medication, healthy eating, regular exercise and weight management remain vital. Therefore, treatment should begin early and address the patient's overall cardiovascular and metabolic health through regular risk assessment and personalised care.



PROF. DR. M SAIFUDDIN
Professor of Endocrinology, Dhaka Medical College Hospital
General Secretary, Bangladesh Endocrine Society

Fatty liver disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes are closely linked conditions driven by excess body fat and insulin resistance. Often developing without symptoms, fatty liver can progress to inflammation, fibrosis, cirrhosis and liver cancer, while also increasing the risk of diabetes and heart disease. South Asians face additional risks as abdominal fat can accumulate even at a normal body weight. A growing belly, dark skin around the neck, skin tags, snoring and irregular menstruation may also indicate insulin resistance. Therefore, early screening is essential, particularly for people with obesity, family history of diabetes, high blood pressure or cholesterol, or previous gestational diabetes. Tests including fasting glucose, HbA1c, liver enzymes and ultrasound can help identify risks. Losing 5% of body weight can reduce liver fat, while 7–10% may improve inflammation and early scarring. Healthy eating, at least 150 minutes of weekly exercise, adequate sleep and specialist-guided treatment can prevent complications.



DR. NAZMUL KABIR QURESHI
Associate Professor & Consultant (Endocrinology)
Director, NHN Uttara Executive Center, Dhaka

Type 2 diabetes, once considered an adult disease, is increasingly affecting children and adolescents. This shift is closely linked to changing lifestyles and social structures, including rising obesity, reduced physical activity, increased screen time and greater consumption of high-calorie and fast foods containing trans fats. Around 60–80% of children diagnosed with type 2 diabetes are already overweight. Furthermore, South Asian ancestry, family history, and maternal gestational diabetes, which raises a child's lifetime risk by about 50%, contribute significantly. Fortunately, many of these preventable risk factors can be addressed through coordinated efforts among families, schools, and communities. Type 1 diabetes also requires attention, as it develops through progressive stages that may be identified through specific antibody tests before symptoms or raised blood sugar appear. Greater awareness, risk-based screening and early monitoring are essential. By recognising warning signs and addressing preventable risks, the progression of both types of diabetes and their complications can be reduced.



TANJIM FERDOUS
Head of Strategic Partnerships
The Daily Star (Moderator of the Session)

Diabetes has become one of Bangladesh's major public health challenges, with an estimated 13.9 million adults living with the condition in 2024, according to the International Diabetes Federation's 2025 Diabetes Atlas. However, around 5.4 million, or nearly 39%, remain unaware of their condition. If current trends continue, the number could rise to approximately 23.1 million by 2050. Undiagnosed or poorly controlled diabetes can lead to serious complications affecting the heart, kidneys, eyes and nerves, placing a growing burden on individuals, families and the healthcare system. In line with the World Diabetes Day 2026–27 theme, "Early Action on Diabetes", this roundtable aimed to highlight the importance of early diagnosis, examine gaps in diabetes prevention and treatment, and explore practical ways to expand public awareness, promote healthier lifestyles, improve access to screening and diagnosis, and ensure affordable treatment and quality care across Bangladesh.