

## Over 4.7 million women and children in Afghanistan need malnutrition treatment urgently: UN

The United Nations has said that more than 4.7 million women and children in Afghanistan urgently require malnutrition treatment as drought, economic collapse and reduced aid would lead to nation facing deeper humanitarian crisis, local media reported on Friday. Speaking to reporters, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric warned that Afghanistan's food security situation remains alarming. He stated that one in every four Afghans faces

severe food insecurity, with children being the most impacted, Afghanistan's leading news agency Khaama Press reported. The World Food Programme (WFP) stated that Afghanistan has seen its highest levels of acute malnutrition in 2025. Many impacted children have been admitted for urgent treatment in Kabul's Indira Gandhi hospital. According to the United Nations, more than 4.7

million women and children need immediate care. Aid officials warned that rising malnutrition could cause widespread fatalities and long-term health consequences if timely interventions are not made. Afghanistan continues to struggle with economic collapse, drought and a sharp decline in international aid. Compounded with unemployment and poverty, these factors have severely affected Afghan families' ability to secure food.

Humanitarian organisations have repeatedly called on international community to increase support, warning that current levels of assistance are inadequate to address the scale of the crisis. Earlier in August, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned that Afghanistan faces a worsening humanitarian crisis, with over 22 million people in urgent need of assistance, Khaama Press reported. In its latest report released



on August 28, WHO said more than 16 million Afghans have been targeted for life-saving aid in 2025, yet only 24 per cent of required funding has been secured. The WHO stated that the funding crisis has forced

the closure of more than 420 health facilities, cutting off nearly three million people from essential medical services. Vulnerable groups, including women and children, have been impacted the most by these restrictions.

## Factors distorting BP readings

More often than not, patients and even nurses and doctors are skipping steps that help paint an accurate portrait of someone's blood pressure -- how someone sits and positions their arm, whether they just had a cup of joe or chitchat with their practitioner during the measurement, and other factors can produce readings that are higher or lower than normal blood

pressure. "To really make a dent at improving people's cardiovascular health, we need to screen and treat people for hypertension, but we need to do it correctly," Tammy Brady, a pediatric nephrologist at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore who studies blood-pressure measurement and cardiovascular health in children and adults, told The Wall

Street Journal. "Getting the right reading is important for preventing heart attacks, strokes and other potentially fatal conditions," noted the newspaper, Xinhua news agency reported. What does it take to get the reading right? The patient should sit with both feet on the ground, legs uncrossed, back straight and your arm supported on a table or other

surface, according to guidelines from the American Heart Association and other organisations.

"A cuff should be positioned over your bare arm at the level of your heart. You shouldn't talk or scroll on your phone while it is being measured, and your bladder should be empty. And you should take your blood pressure at least a couple of times in a sit-

ting," added the report. Meanwhile, last month, a research published by experts from an international academic collaboration led by the University of Sydney and University College London, had suggested that doing five minutes of physical activity, such as walking uphill or stair climbing every day may help to lower blood pressure. According to the study by the Prospective Physical Activity, Sitting and Sleep (ProPASS) Consortium,

replacing sedentary behavior with 20-27 minutes of exercise per day can result in a clinically meaningful reduction in blood pressure. "High blood pressure is one of the biggest health issues globally, but unlike some major causes of cardiovascular mortality there may be relatively accessible ways to tackle the problem in addition to medication," Emmanuel Stamatakis, joint senior author and Director of the ProPASS Consortium from the University of Sydney, said.

## Healthcare workers enthusiastic about using GenAI, most firms not ready to adopt: Report



While healthcare professionals widely recognise the transformative potential of generative AI (GenAI) in solving sustainability problems, including the workforce crisis, most organisations are not yet ready to harness its full value, according to a report on Friday.

The new report from Wolters Kluwer Health identified strong enthusiasm for using GenAI to address the current challenges of workforce shortages, burnout, high healthcare costs, and rising administrative burdens, as well as keen interest in leveraging

GenAI to achieve the next level of innovation and efficiency across the enterprise. However, the data, based on a survey of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, allied health professionals, and administrators, showed a clear disconnect between what organisations say they want to achieve with GenAI and how prepared they are to deliver on that promise. For example, the report showed that while 80 per cent of respondents cited "optimising workflows" as a top organisational goal, only 63 per cent feel prepared to use GenAI to do so. "GenAI has the potential to

be a powerful tool for supporting sustainability in healthcare organizations right now, as well as preparing them for a more efficient future," said Greg Samios, CEO of Wolters Kluwer Health. "The challenge is developing a strategy that can both optimise the current state in a highly volatile environment and simultaneously equip organisations with the digital capabilities they need to remain competitive over the next several years. Right now, organisations are at risk of falling behind unless they take a more cohesive approach to mak-

ing GenAI standardised, scalable, and impactful," he added.

The report noted that GenAI-driven technologies are likely to be part of the solution for longstanding challenges, such as addressing the burdens of prior authorisations (67 per cent), electronic health record (EHR) management (62 per cent), cybersecurity preparedness (68 per cent), and supporting telehealth/virtual care programmes (65 per cent).

But only 18 per cent of survey respondents were aware of formal organisational policies governing GenAI use, and only one in five reported being required to take structured training. As a result, more than half (57 per cent) believe that overreliance on GenAI may erode clinical decision-making skills. The report showed that 55 per cent are concerned that lack of transparency around GenAI's potential role in making diagnoses could contribute to unclear reasoning behind patient-facing decisions.

## New potential breast cancer drug identified

Houston: Scientists, including an Indian-American researcher, have identified a molecule that can help treat breast cancer, giving hope to patients who have become resistant to traditional therapies.

The first-in-class molecule shuts down oestrogen-sensitive breast cancer in a new way, researchers said.

First-in-class drugs are those that work by a unique mechanism — in this case a molecule that targets a protein on the oestrogen receptor of tumour cells.

The potential drug offers hope

for patients whose breast cancer has become resistant to traditional therapies.

"This is a fundamentally different, new class of agents for oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer," said Ganesh Raj, professor at the University of Texas Southwestern (UT Southwestern) Simmons Cancer Centre.

"Its unique mechanism of action overcomes the limitations of current therapies," Raj said.

All breast cancers are tested to determine if they require oestrogen to grow and about

80 per cent are found to be oestrogen-sensitive, researchers said.

These cancers can often be effectively treated with hormone therapy, such as tamoxifen, but as many as a third of these cancers eventually become resistant, they said.

The new compound is a potential highly effective, next-line treatment for these patients, said Raj.

Traditional hormonal drugs, such as tamoxifen, work by attaching to a molecule called the oestrogen receptor in cancer cells, preventing oestrogen from binding to the receptor, a

necessary step for cancer cells to multiply.

However, the oestrogen receptor can mutate and change its shape over time so that the treatment drug no longer fits neatly with the receptor. When this happens, the cancer cells start multiplying again.

Blocking such "protein-protein interactions" has been a dream of cancer researchers for decades.

The drug works by blocking other molecules - proteins called co-factors - that also must attach to the oestrogen receptor for cancer cells to multiply.

## Air Pollution: Here's Why And How To Detox Your Lungs

Infections and chronic lung conditions like asthma can all be caused by or made worse by poor air quality. The danger is higher for individuals who already have lung diseases. The current spike in poor air quality has further worsened our exposure to pollutants. You may notice a sudden appearance of symptoms if you are exposed to high pollution levels, such as on a busy road or during a high pollution episode like right now. These include coughing, feeling out of breath, and inflamed airways. You should see your doctor for a check up if you discover that these symptoms occur frequently.

There are various methods to enhance our lung health without having to use medications. Lungs are self-cleaning systems that will start to repair once they are not exposed to pollution anymore. Continue reading to understand effective ways through which you can cleanse your lungs and reduce further degradation due to air pollution.

Protective and corrective measures to detox your lungs

1. Exercise regularly Regular exercise can help people maintain healthy lungs in addition to improving their physical and emotional well-being and lowering their chance of developing a number of diseases. Exercise makes the muscles work harder, which speeds up breathing and increases the amount of oxygen delivered to the muscles. Morning and evening hours usually have the highest pollution levels due to temperature inversions. If possible, exercise at late morning or early afternoon when sunlight and slight winds help disperse pollutants.

2. Avoid catching infections Current air quality and weather changes can make one prone to infections. By getting vaccinated against the flu and pneumonia, washing your hands frequently, and avoiding contact with people who are congested or suffering from other illnesses, you can prevent further damage to your lungs.

3. Keep indoors clean It's critical to maintain clean indoor air quality. Invest in a high-quality vacuum and vacuum frequently. Avoid using aerosol sprays and go for fragrance-free, natural cleaning supplies. Make sure to sweep and dust your home regularly.

4. Try steaming Inhaling water vapour is known as steam inhalation, which helps to open the airways and may also assist to release mucus The airways' mucous membranes might become dry in polluted and cold environments, which can also reduce blood flow. On the other hand, steam warms and moistens the air, which may help with breathing and help to break up mucus in the lungs and airways.

5. Improve your diet Changing your food can also aid your lung health, particularly if you have a chronic illness. Your mind and body will stay healthy if you include foods high in antioxidants in your diet, along with a variety of vitamins and nutrients.

Air Pollution: Here's Why And How To Detox Your Lungs

Air Pollution: Wear a mask to restrict exposure to pollutants

Infections and chronic lung conditions like asthma can all be caused by or made worse by poor air quality. The danger is higher for individuals who already have lung diseases. The current spike in poor air quality has further worsened our exposure to pollutants. You may notice a sudden appearance of symptoms if you are exposed to high pollution levels, such as on a busy road or during a high pollution episode like right now. These include coughing, feeling out of breath, and inflamed airways. You should see your doctor for a check up if you discover that these symptoms occur frequently.

## AHPI calls out Star Health against unfair practices, warns suspension of cashless services

The Association of Healthcare Providers – India (AHPI) on Friday issued a formal notice to Star Health Insurance against "unfair practices" and warned suspension of cashless services for its policyholders by hospitals.

In a statement, AHPI listed the persistent issues faced by member hospitals associated with Star Health.

These include "continued refusal to revise tariffs for several years in line with prevailing healthcare cost inflation, pressure to further reduce outdated tariffs, arbitrary withdrawal of cashless services, unjustified deductions from hospital bills, and

claim rejections post final approval," the statement said. "Collectively, these practices have caused serious disservice and hardship to patients and their families," it added. AHPI pointed out that these issues may lead to compromised patient safety and quality of care by the member hospitals.

"Unless Star Health Insurance takes definitive steps to address the concerns expressed by member hospitals in a timely manner, AHPI and its member hospitals may be constrained to take appropriate action, including withdrawal of cashless services for the policyholders of Star Health Insurance, effective

from September 22, 2025," warned the association, representing over 15,000 hospitals and healthcare institutions across the country.

The decision follows repeated complaints from member hospitals about the questionable practices.

In addition, the Insurance Ombudsman Annual Report 2023-24 corroborates the systemic malpractice of Star Health Insurance, which topped the list with over 13,300 complaints in FY24, over 10,000 of which related to partial or full claim rejections -- a number exceeding the combined complaints against the next four largest health insurers.

"The systemic failure of Star Health Insurance to address legitimate grievances, combined with their unfair practices, leaves us with no choice but to take appropriate action. Our primary responsibility is to safeguard the interests of both patients and healthcare providers. No insurer should be allowed to jeopardise patient care or undermine the financial viability of hospitals for commercial gain," said Dr. Girdhar Gyani, Director General at AHPI. Member hospitals shall continue to provide treatment to patients with policies from Star Insurance Company at self-pay rates, who shall seek

reimbursement from their insurer on a post-discharge basis.

AHPI strongly urges member hospitals to continue supporting affected patients by facilitating access to care via alternate payment and reimbursement channels. AHPI and its members reiterate their commitment to partnering with insurers to ensure affordable, accessible, and high-quality healthcare for all.

"We remain open to constructive engagement and look forward to a positive resolution in the best interests of patients and healthcare providers alike," added Dr. Gyani.

### EDUCATION PLUS

## NEET UG -2025 likely to be held in online mode: Experts share pros and cons

As the National Testing Agency (NTA) deliberates on transitioning the NEET UG (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test - Undergraduate) from the traditional pen-and-paper format to an online mode, the decision holds significant implications for medical aspirants across India. With over 20 lakh students appearing annually, NEET UG is one of the most competitive entrance exams in the country, serving as the gateway to undergraduate medical and dental courses. As a medical counsellor, it's crucial to analyse the potential impacts of such a decision on students, the examination process, and the education system as a whole.

THE CURRENT SYSTEM: PEN-AND-PAPER MODE

NEET UG has traditionally been conducted in the pen-and-paper format. This offline mode ensures accessibility to students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations, including rural areas where access to digital infrastructure remains limited. The format has been viewed as more comfortable for students accustomed to writing exams on paper, a system they have followed throughout their academic journey.

However, the current system also comes with challenges, such as logistical issues in distributing and collecting exam papers, risks of paper leaks, and errors in manual evaluation. Over the years, there has been a growing demand to modernise the examination process, prompting discussions about transitioning to an online format.

WHY CONSIDER ONLINE MODE?

The primary motivation for moving NEET UG to an online mode is to enhance efficiency, security, and transparency in the examination process. Online exams have already been successfully implemented for other national-level entrance exams like JEE (Joint Entrance Examination) for engineering aspirants. Proponents of the online mode argue that it could reduce instances of malpractice, minimise human error in evaluation, and provide instant processing of results.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in education, with many schools and coaching institutes offering online classes and mock tests. A shift to an online mode would align with this digital transformation, preparing students for a future where technology plays a more significant role in learning and assessment.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE ONLINE MODE

Despite the potential benefits, transitioning NEET UG to an online format is not without challenges. India's digital divide is a major concern. While urban areas may have the infrastructure required for conducting online exams, rural regions often lack reliable internet connectivity, access to computers, and electricity. This disparity could disadvantage students from rural and economically weaker sections, contradicting the principles of equity and fairness that NEET aims to uphold.

Additionally, many NEET aspirants are more comfortable with the traditional pen-and-paper format and may find the transition to online exams intimidating. Navigating the online interface, managing time on digital platforms, and dealing with technical glitches could increase stress levels among students.

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

The decision to shift to an online format has sparked mixed reactions among students. While some believe that online exams could make the process more streamlined and modern, others feel that it might create unnecessary hurdles.

For instance, a student from a rural background may express concerns about the availability of a nearby online test centre, while an urban student might worry about the reliability of the computer systems and the internet during the exam. Coaching institutes, which play a significant role in NEET preparation, are also divided in their opinions. Many are already offering digital resources, but others emphasise that a significant portion of their students still prefer offline study materials and tests.

THE WAY FORWARD

As the NTA prepares to make a final decision, it is essential to strike a balance between modernisation and inclusivity. If NEET UG is to be conducted online, the authorities must address the following concerns:

- Infrastructure Development: Establishing well-equipped test centres in rural and remote areas to ensure equitable access for all students.
- Training and Awareness: Organising mock tests and training sessions to familiarise students with the online format and reduce anxiety.
- Technical Support: Providing robust technical support during the examination to handle any glitches promptly.
- Hybrid Models: Exploring the possibility of a hybrid approach, allowing students to choose between online and offline modes based on their comfort and accessibility.

The decision to shift NEET UG to an online mode is a significant one, with far-reaching consequences for lakh of medical aspirants. While modernisation of the examination process is inevitable, it is crucial to ensure that the transition is smooth, inclusive, and student-friendly. As a medical counsellor, I advise students to stay adaptable, embrace technological advancements, and focus on thorough preparation, regardless of the mode of examination. Change, after all, is the only constant, and those who adapt will always find a way to succeed.

The final decision from the NTA is eagerly awaited, and it is hoped that it will prioritise students' interests while fostering a fair and efficient examination system.

**By-Vijay Garg,  
Retired Principal  
Malout Punjab**