

HealthToday

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SUPER-SIZED PULLOUT

**MAKING
PARENTHOOD A
REALITY VOL 1**

**CONTACT LENS
CAUSE
BLINDNESS?**

**REMOVING
BIRTHMARKS**

DUA LIPA

LASHES
OUT
AGAINST
BULLYING



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KDN PP 9626/12/2012 (031440)



HealthToday

HAPPY NATIONAL DAY

31 August 2021

*We are all Malaysians. This is the bond that unites us.
Let us always remember that unity is our fundamental strength
as a people and as a nation.*

~ Tunku Abdul Rahman



EXPAND YOUR MUSIC PLAYLIST!

WORDS **HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG**
DESIGN **HO KAN KEONG**



International
Strange Music Day
falls on August 24th. Yes,
there is such a day! This is a day
for us to step out of our musical comfort
zone and discover other varieties of music
that we normally won't listen to.

MUSIC TO YOUR EARS, BENEFITS FOR YOUR BRAIN

Scientists have found that when a person listens to music, blood flow increases in the brain areas involved in generating and controlling emotions.

Music can also stimulate many other areas of the brain, including those involved in memory, imagination, and attention. Thus, listening to music can have a profoundly positive effect on our emotions and cognitive system.

Music may even play a role in memory enhancement. A 2008 study found that stroke patients experienced improved recovery of their verbal memory and focused attention after listening to music daily for 2 months (under the supervision of a music therapist), compared to those that only listened to audiobooks or did not listen to music at all.

SO, LISTEN TO MUSIC—TODAY AND EVERY DAY!

To celebrate International Strange Music Day, try out music that you don't typically listen to. For example, if you mostly listen to pop, try classical, folk, or even electronic dance music. You might be pleasantly surprised with what you might find!

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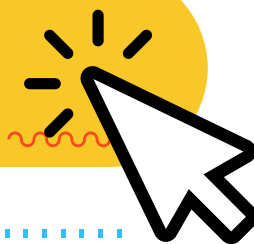
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HO KAN KEONG

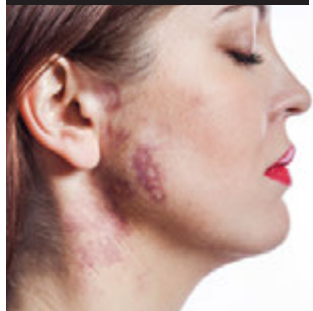
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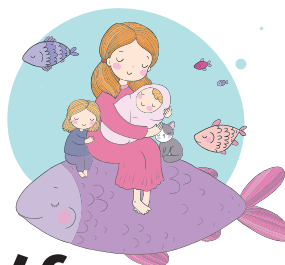
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HealthToday IS PUBLISHED 11 TIMES A YEAR BY MIMS.

PP9626/12/2012 (031440) (Malaysia)

Printed by Times Offset (M) Sdn Bhd (194695-w)
Bangunan Times Publishing, Lot 46, Subang Hi Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga,
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WE ARE STAYING AT HOME, BUT WHO SAYS WE CAN'T PARTY?

I threw a party recently with 8 people. We grouped up close and I believed we shot about a dozen people by the end of the party.

Oh, there is no need to call the police. It was a virtual party; I was testing out this nice virtual party app, Houseparty. (Disclaimer: no one is paying me to talk about them, and my view about the app is my personal opinion only, not an endorsement in any way.)

That app allowed me to throw a party inside the popular game *Fortnite*, so that my nephew would be able to boss the rest of the guests around as we engaged in a virtual battle royale with other players. I have played this game before, while my brother—my nephew's dad—was a pro at video games, so we didn't fare too badly. My parents and sister-in-law observed and commented on our performance from the sidelines, so I knew my nephew was making an effort to mind his language when the grown-ups were watching!

After the *Fortnite* session, we tried out the party games available on the app.

The trivia game was a favourite. While this party started out as an experiment of mine, it became a family moment that I'd cherish for a long time. Thinking back, our family gatherings admittedly had devolved frequently into a familiar kind of malaise: most of us on our phones despite being together in the same room. How odd that it took a Movement Control Order to bring us together and make us feel like a 'real' family again, despite the physical distance separating us in real life.

Let this be a lesson to myself, to always keep the heart and soul of family alive. As long as we are still here in this world, let's cherish every moment we are fortunate to have with our loved ones. The phone can wait.

Lim Teck Choon

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TALK TO US!



Tell us your thoughts on health-related matters.

ASK AN EXPERT!

Drop us a note if you have any health-related questions. We will get in touch with a suitable healthcare professional to obtain the answer.


SHARE YOUR EXPERTISE!

If you are a healthcare professional, and would love to share your thoughts or insight on health-related matters, we will love to hear from you.

SHARE YOUR STORY!

If you have an inspiring story to share about your health or health-related advocacy efforts, we will love to hear from you too!

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Malaysia Healthcare has released a digital book, '**A Hundred Unsung Heroes**', to express the gratitude of a nation to the our frontliners' relentless spirit and monumental efforts in keeping COVID-19 infections under control.

This book offers 100 stories that highlight the grit and resilience of ordinary Malaysian frontliners from various public and private sectors such as healthcare, the armed forces, police, immigration, non-governmental organisations, and e-commerce.



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- Helps relax smooth muscles
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INSECT BITES

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LET'S TALK ABOUT EPSOM SALT FOOT SOAKS

I have read that Epsom salt foot soaks are an easy and affordable remedy for multiple foot issues. What are the benefits of Epsom salt foot soaks, and where can I get Epsom salt?

EPSOM SALT EXPLAINED

Epsom salt is another name for magnesium sulphate salt. It's commonly used as a bath salt and an antiseptic.

Despite its name, it is not used as a table salt. If you taste Epsom salt, you'll find that it's rather bitter and not very appetizing.

COMPILED BY **HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG**
DESIGN **RAZLI ABDUL RAHMAN**

HOW EPSOM SALT FOOT SOAKS CAN HELP WITH FOOT ISSUES

CORNS AND CALLUSES

Calluses are hardened skin that most often grows on the surface of the feet. They usually don't cause discomfort, but they can be bothersome and unsightly.

Meanwhile, corns are hardened skin that can grow deep into your skin tissue—they also most often appear on the feet. Some corns can be painful, especially when pressed.

How Epsom salt helps. Treatment of these foot issues typically involve exfoliation, which is the process of removing dead skin at the affected areas of the foot in order to 'peel off' the corn or callus.

Soaking your feet in an Epsom salt foot soak once a day helps soften the skin around your corns or calluses. When those areas are softened, it becomes much easier to remove dead skin cells or exfoliate with a pumice stone or filer.

SMALL WOUNDS

If you have a small wound on your foot, soaking the wound in an Epsom salt foot bath can help clean the wound and prevent infection.

Soak daily before putting on a new wound dressing, and do this until the wound is healed.

INGROWN TOENAILS

Just like with calluses and corns, Epsom salt foot soaks can help soften the skin around the ingrown nails. Having softened skin around the toenails prevents the toenails from further growing into your skin and worsening the problem.

See a doctor if your ingrown toenails become painful and/or swollen, or you notice pus around the nail. Your ingrown toenail may be infected and you may need antibiotics to address the infection.

LIM YUANSHUANG
Podiatrist
FootDoctor Podiatry



WHERE TO OBTAIN EPSOM SALT FOOT SOAKS

You can get Epsom salt from any pharmacy. It is an over-the-counter product, so no medical prescription is necessary.

HOW TO PREPARE AN EPSOM SALT FOOT SOAK

1. Fill a small tub with warm water just enough to cover both your feet.
2. Dissolve 2 tablespoons of Epsom salt into the water. Make sure the salts are fully dissolved before soaking.
3. Soak for 15 to 30 minutes.



WORDS **MAK WEN YAO**
DESIGN **HO KAN KEONG**


WOMEN MORE VULNERABLE TO HEART DISEASE WHEN UNDER WORK AND SOCIAL STRESS

Research from Drexel University's Dornsife School of Public Health suggests that psychosocial stress from work and social environments may put women at a higher risk of coronary heart disease, when compared to men.

The study examined 3 sources of stress: job strain, social strain, and stressful life events. The most impactful finding came from the **combined effect of social strain and job strain**. Together, they synergistically led to a **21%**

increased risk of coronary heart disease.

High-stress life events, such as death, divorce, and major financial problems are linked to a 12% increased risk of heart disease. High levels of social strain, such as negative relationships with friends and family members, could raise the risk by 9%.

The link to heart diseases could be due to damage on blood vessels when one is exposed to prolonged stress. Stress has been shown to elevate blood pressure, induce inflammation, and increase 'fight or flight' responses—all of which, in turn, accelerate pathological changes in one's cardiovascular system.

Reference: Wang, C., Lê-Scherban, F., Taylor, J., Salmoirago-Blotcher, E., Allison, M., Gefen, D., Robinson, L., & Michael, Y. L. (2021). Associations of job strain, stressful life events, and social strain with coronary heart disease in the Women's Health Initiative Observational Study. *Journal of the American Heart Association*, 10(5), e017780. <https://doi.org/10.1161/JAHA.120.017780>



TAMPONS AND SANITARY NAPKINS THAT CAN DETECT YEAST INFECTION, ANYONE?

Vaginal thrush, or *vulvovaginal candidiasis*, is a common condition caused by the overgrowth of yeast in a lady's private parts. It can cause annoying, even embarrassing bothers such as curd-like discharge, burning sensation, and itchiness of the vulva or the surrounding skin.

Embarrassment and social

taboo, however, may cause women with this condition to delay seeking help or suffer in silence. This is not ideal because vaginal thrush, when left untreated, may lead to more serious health complications. For example, yeast may get into the bloodstream and cause potentially fatal infections at other parts of the body.

The good news is that a team of researchers from India had found an innovative approach to detect yeast infection discreetly. They incorporated specially-treated cotton threads into tampons and sanitary pads.

These cotton threads were treated with a substance called L-proline β -naphthylamide. The presence of this compound will allow the threads to turn bright pink within 10 minutes of coming into contact with yeast.

Reference: Prabhu, A., Singhal, H., Giri Nandagopal, M. S., Kulal, R., Peralam Yegneswaran, P., & Mani, N. K. (2021). Knitting thread devices: Detecting *Candida albicans* using napkins and tampons. *ACS Omega*, 6(19), 12667–12675. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acsomega.1c00806>



FINANCIAL TROUBLES TODAY = BODY PAIN DECADES LATER?

A new study suggests that financial stress in midlife could lead to increased physical pain up to 30 years later.

The underlying causes of pain are not solely biological in nature. Psychological and social risk factors are 2 other major components but these factors are rarely studied.

To rectify this oversight, researchers from the University of Georgia tracked 508 married couples for a period of 27 years, to identify any association between financial hardship and physical pain.

They found that families that struggled with financial stress during their early middle years reported increased physical pain in their later years. This association was significant even after taking into account other possible contributing factors to pain, such as other existing physical illnesses and advancing age.

“Finances are an important component of our work because it’s such a relevant contextual stressor families face,” said Catherine Walker O’Neal, one of the authors of the paper.

“Nearly two-thirds of adults complain of some type of bodily pain, and nearly that many complain of loneliness. That percentage is going up, and the health cost for that is going up. That is a public health concern,” said Eric T Klopach, another author of the study.

Based on the results, the study proposed that early interventions to address a family’s financial stress should be put in place, to help affected individuals develop a stronger sense of control over their circumstances.

Reference: Wickrama, K., Klopach, E. T., & O’Neal, C. W. (2021). Midlife family financial strain, sense of control and pain in later years: An investigation of rural husbands and wives. *Stress and health: journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress*, 10.1002/smi.3038. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.3038>

UNHEALTHY EATING BEHAVIOURS MAY HURT WORK PERFORMANCE ON THE FOLLOWING DAY

Researchers from North Carolina State University recently published a paper that examined the association between full-time workers' unhealthy eating behaviour and the quality of their work. They tracked 97 employees in the United States over 2 weeks to record what these individuals achieved at work and any instances of 'unhealthy eating' after work.

'Unhealthy eating' was defined as consuming too much junk food, having had too much to eat or drink, or having very frequent late-night snacks.



The study found that unhealthy eating behaviour in the evening could lead to emotional and physical strain in the following morning. Participants of the study that indulged in such behaviour were more likely to report feeling guilt and shame over their food choices, as well as higher instances of headache, stomach ache, and diarrhoea. These emotional and physical strains, in turn, would alter their behaviour at work—they were less likely to go the extra mile in helping their co-workers or were more withdrawn to avoid work-related situations.

Reference: Cho, S., & Kim, S. (2021). Does a healthy lifestyle matter? A daily diary study of unhealthy eating at home and behavioral outcomes at work. *The Journal of applied psychology*, 10.1037/apl0000890. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000890>

YOU MAY BE HUNGRY BECAUSE YOU EXPERIENCE DIPS IN BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS

A study from King's College London found that individuals with significant sugar dips—a drop below their baseline blood sugar a few hours after a meal—reported a 9% increase in hunger. They also ate more frequently and consumed approximately 300 calories more throughout the day, compared to participants that experience less significant sugar dips.

The researchers estimated that the extra consumption of calories can contribute to more than 9 kg weight gain over a year.

Moreover, they found that different individuals responded differently to sugar dips, regardless of age and body mass index. However, it was also seen that one's metabolic levels, meal choices, and activity

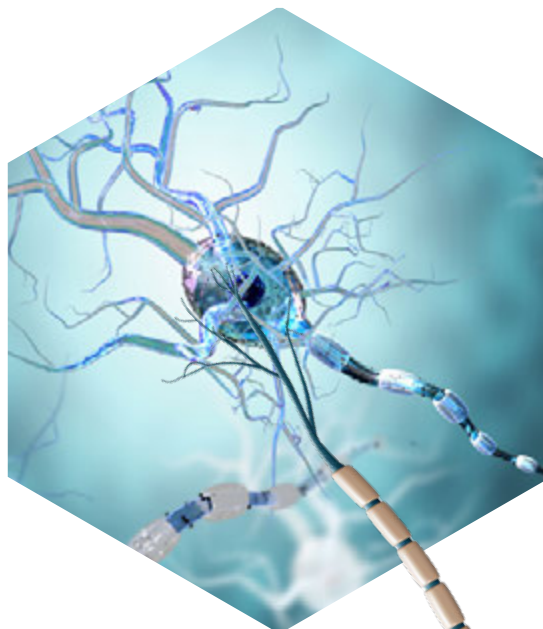
levels can influence the extent of sugar dips.

"Our study paves the way for data-driven, personalized guidance for those seeking to manage their hunger and calorie intake in a way that works with rather than against their body," said Patrick Wyatt, the lead author of the study.



Reference: Wyatt, P., Berry, S. E., Finlayson, G., O'Driscoll, R., Hadjigeorgiou, G., Drew, D. A., Khatib, H. A., Nguyen, L. H., Linenberg, I., Chan, A. T., Spector, T. D., Franks, P. W., Wolf, J., Blundell, J., & Valdes, A. M. (2021). Postprandial glycaemic dips predict appetite and energy intake in healthy individuals. *Nature metabolism*, 3(4), 523–529. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42255-021-00383-x>

HAVE WE DISCOVERED THE GENETIC ORIGIN OF HUNTINGTON DISEASE?



Huntington disease (HD) is an adult-onset disease which sees the affected person progressively losing control over their body movement and cognitive abilities. This loss of control is due to the continuous deterioration of the person's nerve cells. The disease is currently incurable, and we know little of its origin.

We may have made one step closer to understanding this disease better when a team of scientists from Hong Kong shared that they had discovered a potential origin of this disease: a small piece of genetic material known as the *small CAG repeat RNAs (sCAG)*.

Led by Professor Ho Yin Edward Chan, the team demonstrated that the accumulation of *sCAG* in cells could induce nerve cell DNA damage. Specifically, *sCAG* significantly reduces the function of a protector gene (*NUDT16*) in the body. As the protective function of *NUDT16* is lost, DNA damage and cell death result.

They further discovered that a molecule called DB213 could effectively inhibit the action of *sCAG*. Tests on mice show that DB213 can yield promising results in reversing the motor symptoms of Huntington disease in these animals.



Reference: Peng, S., Guo, P., Lin, X., An, Y., Sze, K. H., Lau, M., Chen, Z. S., Wang, Q., Li, W., Sun, J. K., Ma, S. Y., Chan, T. F., Lau, K. F., Ngo, J., Kwan, K. M., Wong, C. H., Lam, S. L., Zimmerman, S. C., Tuccinardi, T., Zuo, Z., ... Chan, H. (2021). CAG RNAs induce DNA damage and apoptosis by silencing *NUDT16* expression in polyglutamine degeneration. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 118(19), e2022940118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2022940118>

DON'T LET YOUR CONTACT LENS BECOME A CAUSE FOR BLINDNESS!



DR CHAN JAN BOND
Ophthalmologist, Eye Surgeon
& Refractive Surgeon
International Specialist Eye Centre



Ophthalmologist Dr Chan Jan Bond reveals that **corneal ulcers** are one of the hidden yet leading causes of blindness in Malaysia.

The highest risk factor of corneal ulcers is **improper contact lens care**. Hence, Dr Chan is here today to share his insight on corneal ulcers and the precautions contact lens wearers can take to prevent them.

WORDS **HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG**
DESIGN **RAZLI ABDUL RAHMAN**

The cornea is the transparent front part of the eye that covers the iris, pupil, and lens (see **Figure 1**). “It is much like the glass that covers the face of a watch,” Dr Chan says.

A corneal ulcer is an open sore in the cornea. It can cause severe inflammation and infection that may lead to the loss of corneal tissue, and in some cases, permanent blindness.

“Usually, the cornea is protected by eye tears and a layer of the cornea called the corneal epithelium. When there is a breach in the corneal epithelium—due to injury, a foreign body, or severe dry eyes—the protection against infection is lost. Hence, the cornea is infected. Such infection can give rise to a corneal ulcer,” Dr Chan elaborates.

SIGNS THAT YOU MAY HAVE CORNEAL ULCER

Dr Chan advises to see an ophthalmologist immediately if you develop any of the following symptoms.

- Eye redness
- Severe pain
- A sensation of having a foreign body in the eye
- Tearing
- Eye discharge
- Blurred vision
- Eye swelling

COMPLICATIONS OF CORNEAL ULCER

Corneal ulcers often leave behind **corneal scars**, which are likely to be permanent.

These scars may obstruct vision. “In severe cases, a corneal transplant may be needed, where the corneal tissue is replaced with donor tissue. In

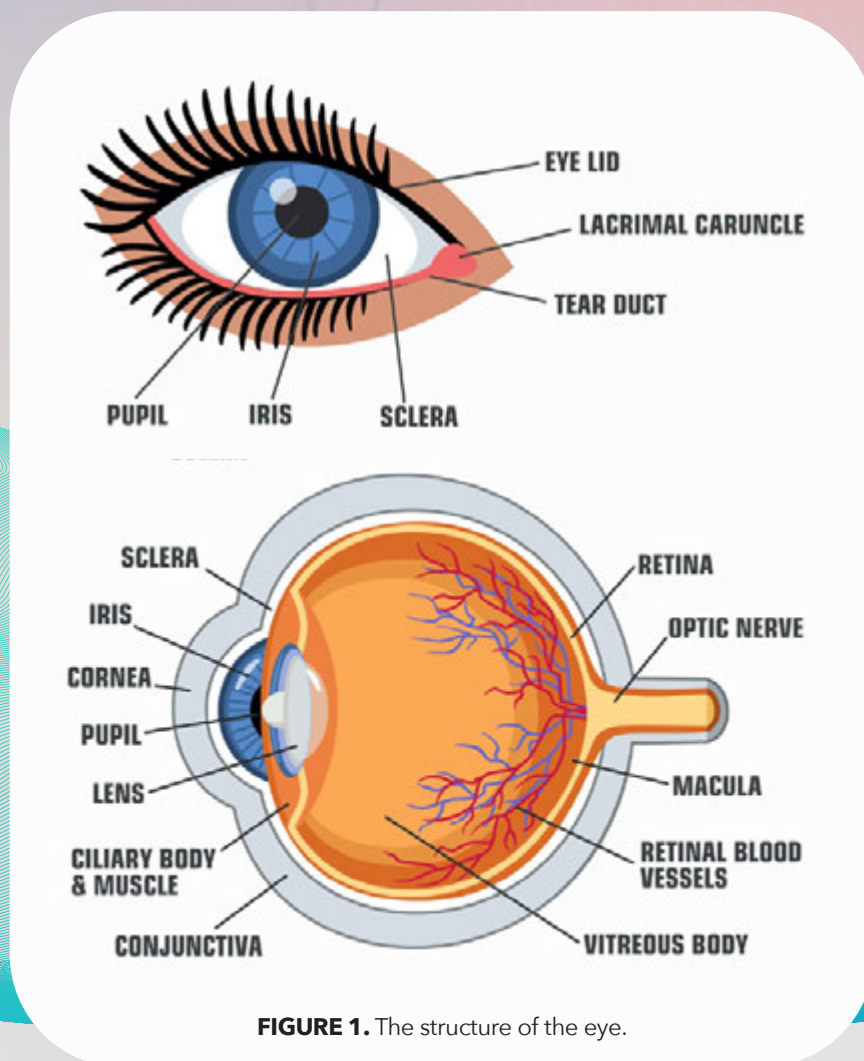


FIGURE 1. The structure of the eye.

extreme cases, an infection may lead to permanent blindness despite surgical procedures,” Dr Chan explains.

HOW CORNEAL ULCER IS TREATED

Corneal ulcers must be treated by an ophthalmologist.

“Strong antibiotics or antifungals would be prescribed by the ophthalmologist. In severe cases, the patient may need to be admitted into a hospital ward for close observation,” Dr Chan elaborates.

“Never self-treat or buy over-the-

counter medications to treat a corneal ulcer. Use of the wrong medications—such as steroid-containing eye drops—may lead to severe infection and can cause permanent blindness,” Dr Chan stresses.

Dr Chan shares that for severe cases, a corneal transplant may be needed. This surgery involves the replacement of the affected corneal tissue by corneal tissue obtained from a donor.

Even so, he points out that, in extreme cases, an infection may lead to permanent blindness in spite of surgical procedures having taken place.

CONTACT LENS WEARERS ARE MORE AT RISK OF CORNEAL ULCERS

There are various types of contact lenses in the market. Some types bring a higher risk of infection and corneal ulcers than others.

Contact lens type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Soft contact lens (bi-weekly or monthly disposables)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comfortable to the eye.• Cheapest option.• The monthly types are available in multi-focal prescriptions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High risk of infection if the user has poor hygiene.• Prolonged daily use can cause dry eyes, corneal abrasion, and increased risk of infection.• Limited range of prescription.
Soft daily disposables (one-time use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No cleaning required.• Best for eye health.• Most comfortable type of contact lens.• Good for sports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expensive.• Limited range of prescription.
Rigid gas permeable lens (made of flexible plastics that allow oxygen to pass through the eye)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides excellent vision.• Corrects most vision problems.• Can be used for myopia (near-sightedness) control and corneal refractive therapy.• Carries less risk of infection.• Better oxygen penetration to the eye.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires regular visits to the ophthalmologist or optometrist.• Debris can get onto the lens.• Requires constant use for the eyes to adapt to the lenses.• Can easily slip off the centre of the eye.
Coloured or cosmetic contact lens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can change the colour of your eyes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carries the highest risk of infection, even if the user practices good hygiene.• Requires diligent cleaning of the lenses.• Some brands are not regulated, and prescription is not always required. Hence, some brands may not be safe for use.• Typically contain chemicals that are used to tint colour on these lenses. Some of these chemicals may irritate the eyes.

11 TIPS FOR GOOD CONTACT LENS CARE

PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE

Always wash your hands with soap and water—make sure your hands are clean every time you handle your contact lenses.

FOLLOW DIRECTIONS FROM YOUR OPHTHALMOLOGIST OR OPTOMETRIST REGARDING USE OF YOUR CONTACT LENSES

Adhere to the instructions provided by your contact lens manufacturer on how to clean and store the lens, as well as how long you should use those lenses before disposing of them.

CLEAN WITH STERILE CONTACT LENS SOLUTION (NOT WATER!)

Never use homemade saline solution, tap water, or sterile water to rinse or store your contact lenses.

TAKE THEM OFF BEFORE YOU DO THESE ACTIVITIES

Never sleep, swim, or bathe with your contact lenses on.

DISCARD EXPIRED CONTACT LENSES, EVEN IF THEY ARE UNOPENED

Contact lens preservative solutions can go bad over time. When that happens, the contact lens will no longer be in a sterile condition.

DO NOT WEAR YOUR CONTACT LENSES LONGER THAN INDICATED

Substances such as protein deposits, microorganisms, and allergens can form on the surface of your contact lenses over time. The longer you wear them, the higher is your risk of infection, even if you clean them properly and deeply on a regular basis.

CHANGE YOUR CONTACT LENS CASING EVERY 3 MONTHS, OR WHEN IT GETS CRACKED OR DAMAGED

Always keep the casing clean by rinsing it with sterile contact lens solution, not with tap water.

NEVER SELF-TREAT WITH OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS WHEN YOU HAVE EYE IRRITATION, REDNESS, OR PAIN IN THE EYES

If your eyes become irritated each time you put on your contact lenses, see your ophthalmologist immediately.

CHANGE YOUR CONTACT LENS STORAGE SOLUTION EVERY 3 DAYS

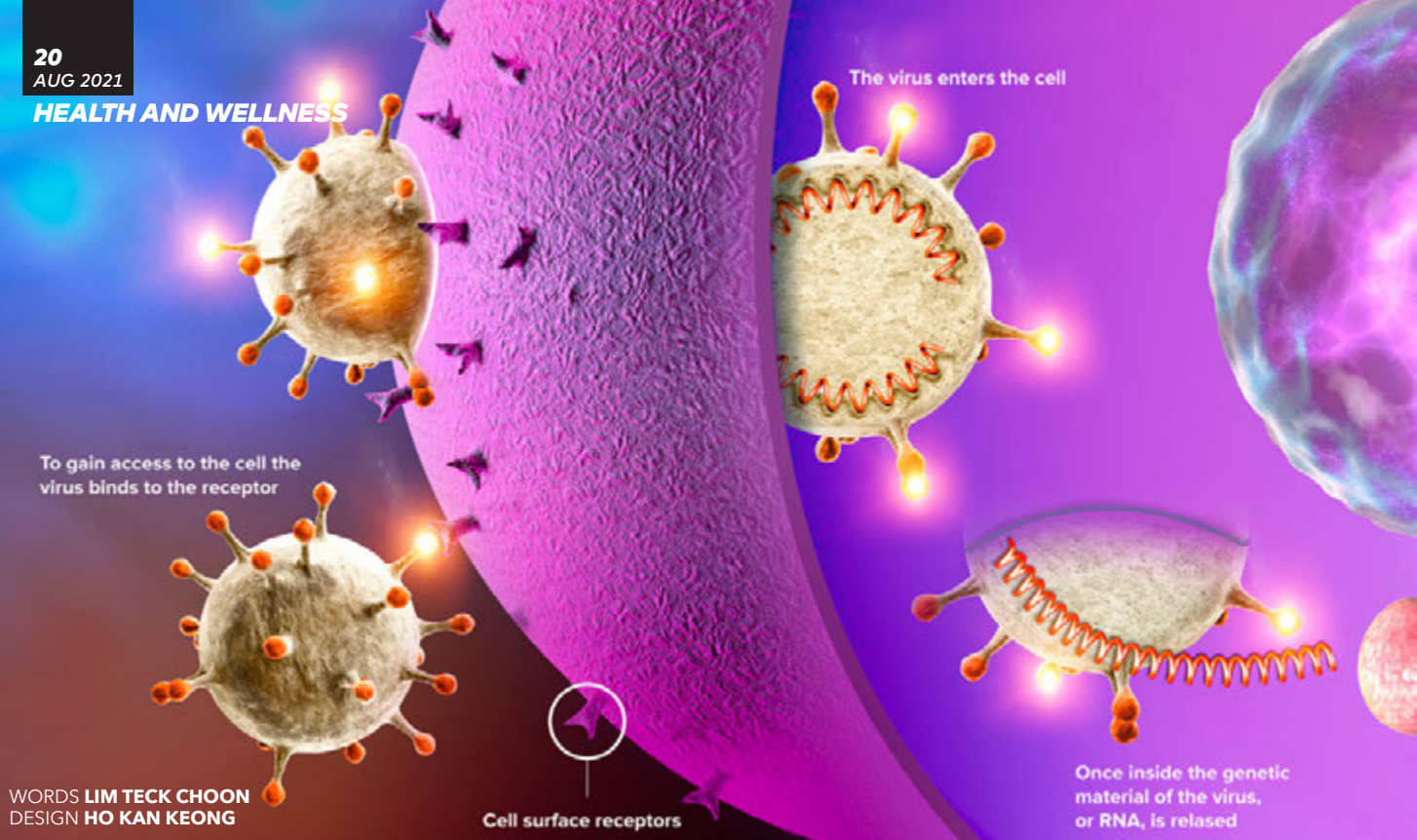
Even if you don't use your contact lenses daily.

BE CAREFUL OF COSMETIC CONTACT LENS

Cosmetic contact lenses are not regulated by any regulatory body. However, they should only be prescribed by a trained professional such as an ophthalmologist or optometrist after proper eye examination and counselling have been carried out. Prescription coloured contact lenses would be a safer option if you buy them from a reputable contact lens maker.

GET YOUR CONTACT LENS FITTED BY AN OPTOMETRIST OR OPHTHALMOLOGIST

Some brands may claim that their lenses are 'one size fits all', but this might not be the case. A poorly fitted contact lens may risk injury to the eye and cause a corneal ulcer.



WORDS LIM TECK CHOON
DESIGN HO KAN KEONG

THE MUTATION & THE EVOLUTION OF THE VIRUS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COVID-19 DISEASE



DR KENNY VOON GAH LEONG
Virologist & Lecturer
International Medical University

Viruses can mutate. Quite easily too, as their basic structure is just genetic material—either deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) or ribonucleic acid (RNA) encapsulated within a protective coat called a **capsid**. They typically replicate by injecting their genetic material into a cell, use the cell's own genetic material replication system to create more copies of the virus.

When a virus makes copies of itself, its genetic material can sometimes be altered slightly due to contact with genetic materials of the host. These changes are called 'mutations'. A virus

with one or more new mutations is referred to as a 'variant' of the original virus.

"A virus mutates for survival, not to kill," explains virologist Dr Kenny Voon Gah Leong. "Humans are a reservoir for viruses such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus responsible for COVID-19. We help them propagate more. They don't want to kill us, the host. If the host dies, there is no co-existence. This is why their main aim is *not* to become more deadly."

VIRUSES DON'T WANT TO KILL US? THEN WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE DYING AFTER BEING INFECTED BY COVID-19?

That's because the virus is still getting to know us humans, as morbid as that may sound.

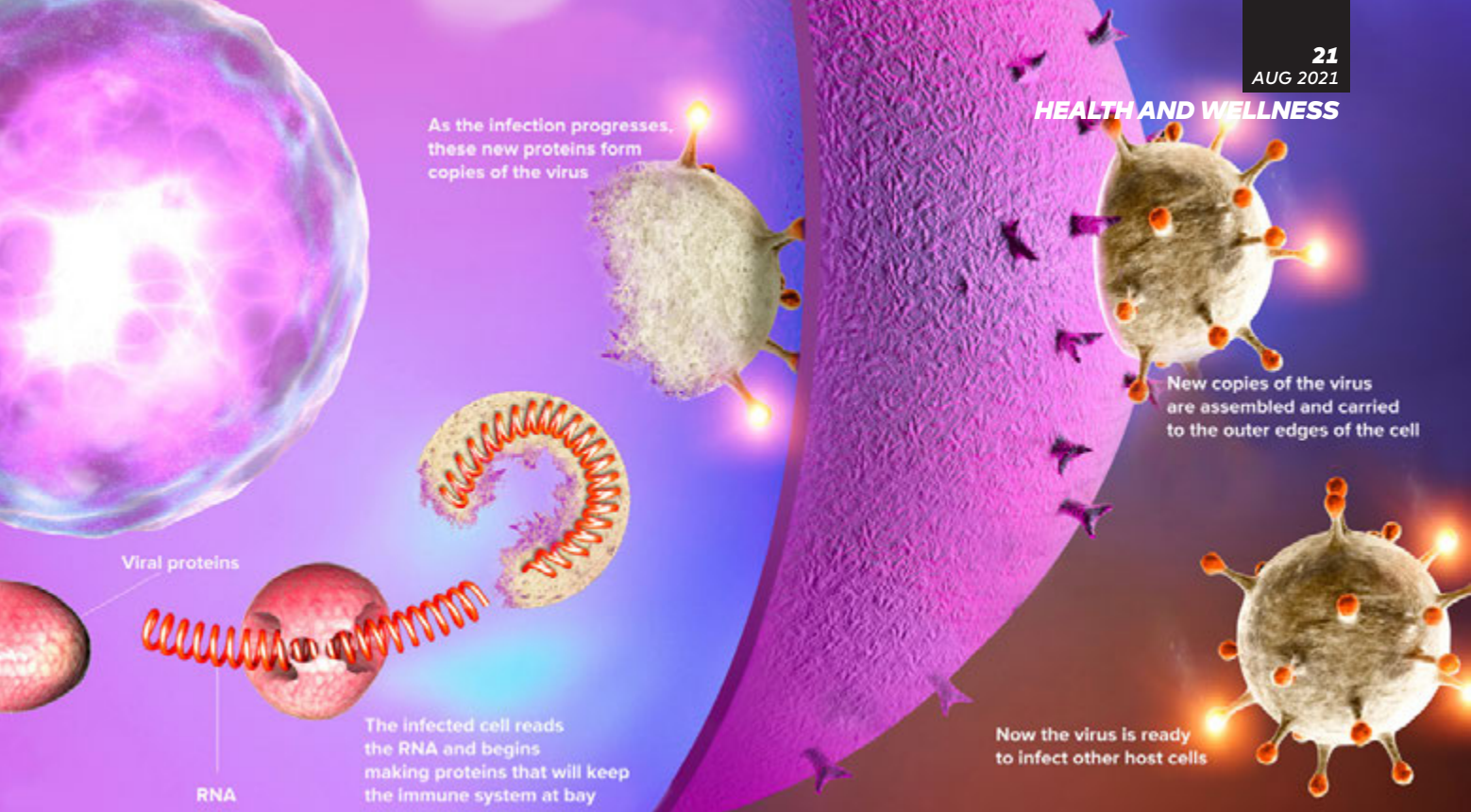
Dr Kenny points out that a high death rate is pretty typical when a

virus makes the initial jump from one species to another.

This is because the environment inside the human host is still a brand new world to the virus.

Laboratory studies comparing the infectivity and virulence of emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants on Syrian hamsters, for example, suggest that new variants may be more easily transmitted from one person to another, but they are not necessarily more deadly. This has been noted on studies on the Delta or Indian variant as well.

However, don't be too hasty to rejoice or assume that the COVID-19 vaccine is no longer necessary. Dr Kenny points out that these tests are conducted in laboratories, often on animals, and more research is needed to determine whether these viruses affect us the same way in the real world. "We will only know for certain once we have more data from community samples."



In our current pandemic, the bat coronavirus carries 96.2% of the same genetic sequence as the SARS-CoV-2 virus in humans, leaving a significant 4% difference. “The virus may have been propagating in another intermediate host before jumping into humans but we have not been able to identify that pro-genitor virus yet,” notes Dr Kenny.

Now that the virus has jumped onto humans, next step is for it to mutate into different variants, in order to

adapt to our bodies. See Table 1 for a list of the SARS-CoV-2 variants that exist at the time of writing.

WHAT DOES ‘VARIANTS OF CONCERN’ MEAN?

The term ‘variants of concern’ (VOCs for short) frequently comes up when it comes to the subject of virus mutation. This term refers to variants that have mutated in such a manner that it has changed significantly from previous generations in the following ways:

- Transmissibility, or how fast and easy it spreads from one person to another.
- Virulence, or how much the virus harms its host cells.
- Antigenicity, how the cells of the immune system respond to the virus.

At the time of writing, there are four VOCs: Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta. Dr Kenny points out that 3 of them—Alpha, Beta, Delta—are recorded in Malaysia

TABLE 1: FROM BATS TO HUMANS
The many variants of SARS-CoV-2

Variants of concern	Variants of interest
Alpha First documented in the UK, September 2020	Epsilon Zeta Eta Theta Iota Kappa Lambda
Beta First documented in South Africa, May 2020	
Gamma First documented in Brazil, November 2020	
Delta First documented in India, October 2020	

‘VARIANTS OF INTEREST’—WHAT ARE THEY?

Variants of interest (VOIs) are a term given to variants that are still largely a mystery of us; we don’t know much about them at present, due to insufficient research data.

WHAT COULD BE DRIVING THE VIRUS TO MUTATE SO QUICKLY?

As of now, we simply don’t know. “We cannot pinpoint what factors induce mutation as there are too many variables,” says Dr Kenny.



COULD MALAYSIA BE HOME TO A BRAND NEW VARIANT?

Given how there are a number of cases in which people are getting infected again after having already been infected by and recovered from COVID-19, there is some speculation of a local strain that has escaped the currently available vaccines.

However, Dr Kenny says that we can only confirm or refute this claim after we have conducted intensive genetic sequencing. This is a very expensive procedure, however, that limits Malaysia from obtaining as much sequencing data from our population as countries such as the US, UK, and China.

At the moment, sequencing is only carried out when it is required. Given our limited resources, it makes more pragmatic sense for our country to focus on vaccinating the population and healing the economy of the country.

Nonetheless, the need to trace and discover various variants of COVID-19 remains important, as doing so will allow us to find out whether available vaccines are still effective against new variants, as well as to develop new measures against future variants.

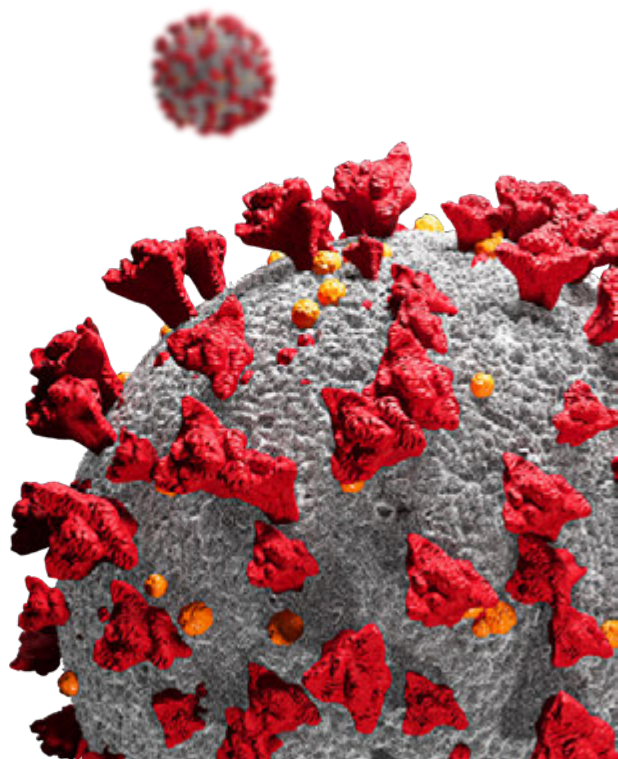
WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THE MUTATING COVID-19 VIRUS?

Individual Malaysians should continue following current SOPs. “Wash your hands, wear your masks, and practice social distancing,” says Dr Kenny. “The virus may become more infectious but the same SOPs will still help to protect us.”

There is also the option of vaccinating ourselves to consider.

SINCE THE VIRUS IS MUTATING PRETTY QUICKLY, IS VACCINATION STILL AN EFFECTIVE PROTECTIVE MEASURE?

Dr Kenny believes that the answer is yes, as studies show that vaccination is still effective against current variants.



MAKING PARENTHOOD A REALITY

Expert advice on overcoming fertility
issues and starting a family

VOLUME 1

WORDS DR AGILAN ARJUNAN &
LIM TECK CHOON
DESIGN HO KAN KEONG



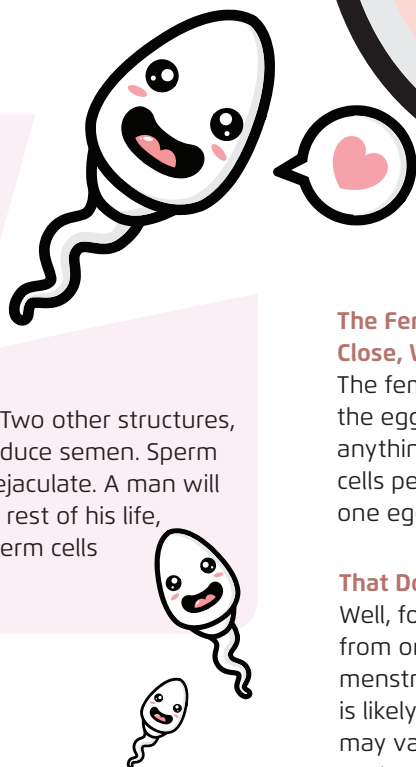
DR AGILAN ARJUNAN
Fertility Specialist & Gynaecologist
evelyn Women Specialist Clinic

“HOW DOES getting pregnant WORK, EXACTLY?”

In this chapter, we will revisit how the menstrual cycle and sex works. Yes, everyone knows how these things work, but bear with us. You may be surprised at what you may or may not know after all!

The Male of Our Species Is Simple

For a man, it's simple. After puberty, Sertoli cells in his testicles begin to produce sperm cells, which are then stored in a structure called epididymis. Two other structures, called the seminal glands, produce semen. Sperm cells and semen mix to form ejaculate. A man will keep producing sperm for the rest of his life, although the quality of the sperm cells can decline with age.



The Female of Our Species... Well, Gather Close, We May Need A While.

The female counterpart to sperm cells is the egg cell. Unlike a man who can release anything from 40 million to 1.2 billion sperm cells per ejaculation, the woman releases only one egg cell per menstrual cycle.

That Doesn't Seem Too Complicated...

Well, for one, the length of the cycle may vary from one woman to another. If a woman's menstrual cycle lasts 28 days, the ovulation is likely to occur on day 14, but again, this also may vary. A woman who takes hormone-based contraceptives such as the Pill may also find her menstrual cycle altered as a result.

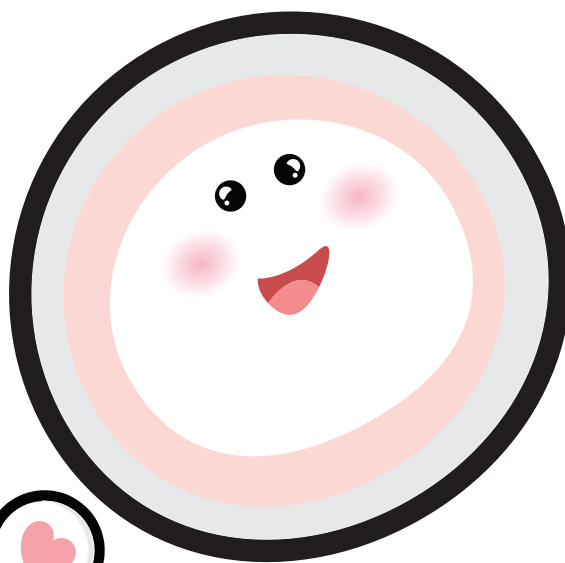
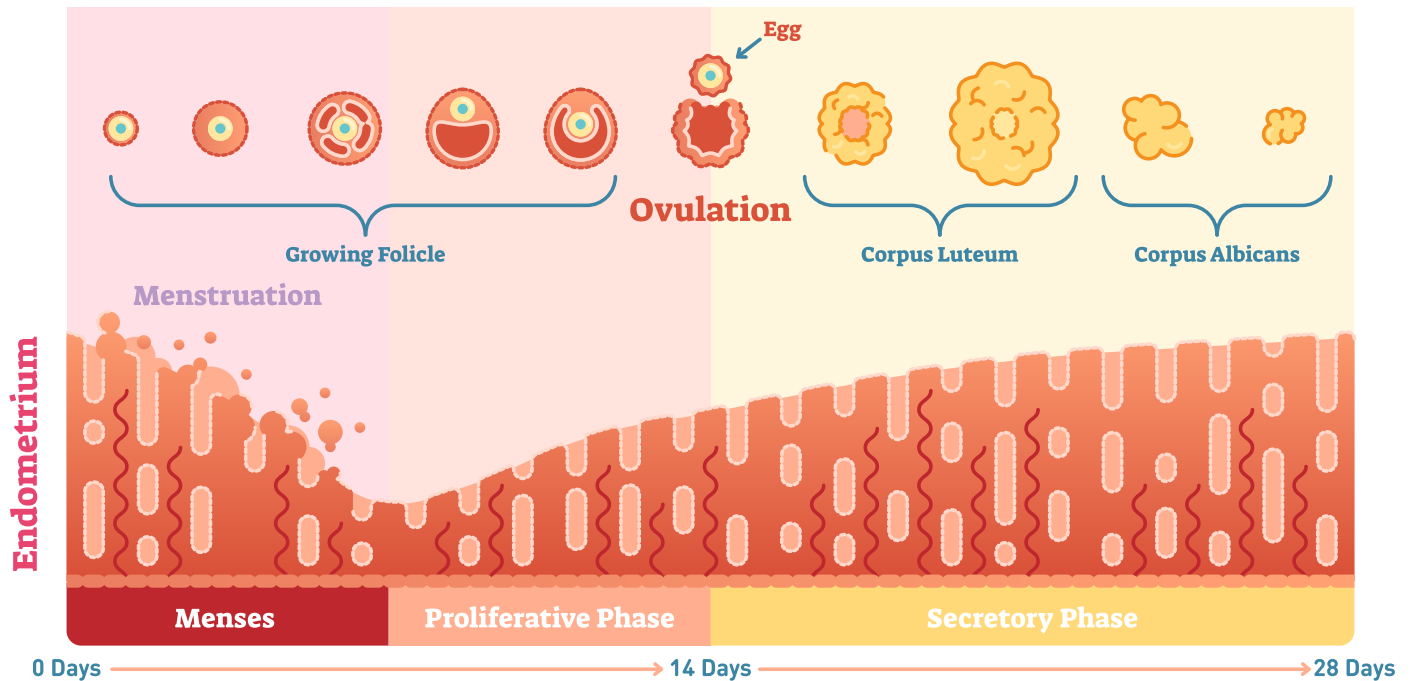


Figure A. That time of the month again, sigh.

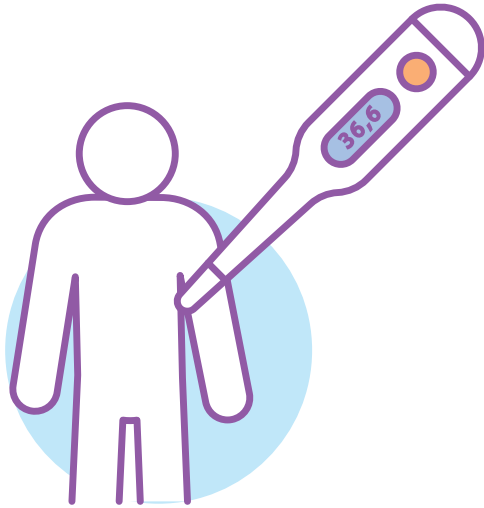


Okay, So How Can I Make

things simple?

Figure A shows the flow (no pun intended, honest!) of a typical menstrual cycle.

- Usually, the whole cycle lasts about 28 days.
- The egg cell is released by one of the two ovaries present, and the time when this momentous event occurs is called the **ovulation**.



OPTION 1: MEASURE YOUR BODY TEMPERATURE

Your body's temperature changes throughout your menstrual cycle. Take your body temperature the **first thing after you wake up (before you get out of bed)** every morning.

Keep a record of your body temperature every day.

What you will be looking for is the period when your body temperature is about 0.2°C higher than the previous 6 days. This is the day when ovulation occurs, and the best time to make a baby will be on that day as well as a few days before.

You can keep track of your temperature for 1 month (or 2 if you want to be more thorough) to understand whether there is a pattern in your menstrual cycle. If there is, then you can predict your most fertile days the next time you and your partner decide to embark on your baby-making efforts.

Note that if you choose to measure your temperature vaginally, you should properly clean the thermometer

after each time, and avoid your taking temperature through this manner if you have a vaginal infection.

Some women choose to measure their temperature by inserting the thermometer into their rectum – temperature readings are most stable through this route – but if you do this, make sure you sterilize the thermometer after each time.

OPTION 2: EXAMINE YOUR CERVICAL MUCOUS PATTERN

This method works for women with a reasonably regular period cycle.

Closer to your ovulation, you may experience clear, egg white-like discharge from your vagina.

This discharge increases to a maximal amount on the day before ovulation.

On the day of ovulation, the discharge amount is reduced considerably.

Therefore, if you notice that your discharge has reduced significantly on a certain day, then the day is very likely the day you are ovulating.

Note that not every woman will notice such discharge.

OPTION 3: URINE TESTING

There are home test kits available that can be purchased for this purpose. **You can start taking this test daily from about day 12 of your menstrual cycle (if you have a regular 28- to 30-day cycle).** Once you see a positive result, you will likely ovulate between 28 and 48 hours.

Don't worry if all these options seem confusing at first. Your doctor can advise you if you have concerns.



#1

Eat well. To maximize your chances of getting pregnant, your body should get the nutrition it needs to function well. It's important to eat regular, adequate meals – at least three a day – and to choose foods that are rich in nutrients and low in fat.

And don't forget nutritious snacks. Healthful snacks help you avoid the temptation to reach out for empty-calorie foods that are high in fat and sugar, and low in nutrition.

Are there any foods that can increase your chances of becoming pregnant? To date, research has yet to find conclusive evidence that certain types of food can boost fertility. There is no harm trying, perhaps, but make sure to check with your doctor, as there is a possibility that certain foods may end up having the opposite effect!

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER AS YOU WORK AT BECOMING PARENTS



#2

Stay active every day. Studies found that regular physical activity has a positive effect on fertility. So, try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. For added fun, exercise with your partner!

Are there any exercises that can improve the odds of a successful conception?

All types of exercise are beneficial. They strengthen muscles and keep the body flexible, plus they also improve stamina to make the process of baby-making a more enjoyable experience. Also, exercise can help you manage your stress levels – always a good thing as stress can affect the mood to make babies. Therefore, mix up your exercise routines – cardio, strength training, yoga, pilates, etc – and have fun.



#3

Don't stress out too much. Don't become so fixated on becoming pregnant that you turn sex to become a nerve-wrecking 'die die also must succeed!' chore. There is an element of luck to a successful conception, so try to relax and have fun in your efforts.



Usually, a pregnancy test can be carried out from the first day of a missed period, but if you have no idea when your next period is due, you can do the test at least 21 days since you last had unprotected sex with your partner.

However, there are pregnancy test kits that claim to be able to detect pregnancy even before you miss a period. We don't have the room to go through all types of pregnancy test kits available in the market here, but you can ask a pharmacist for recommendations.



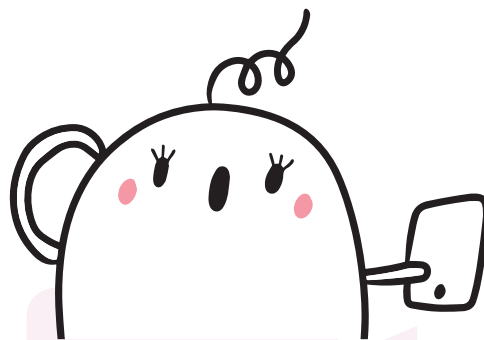
How do I use a pregnancy test kit?

Generally, you need a sample of your urine to use the test kit on. Different types of test kits may have different instructions for use, so read them carefully first.

Can I trust the result?

Well, all pregnancy test kits work by detecting the presence of a hormone called the hormone human chorionic gonadotrophin (hCG) in your urine. Your body produces this hormone at around 6 days after a successful fertilization, so its presence in your urine is a confirmation of pregnancy.

If you have a **positive result**, you should visit a gynaecologist for further confirmation. If you have a **negative result**, you can try again after a few days.

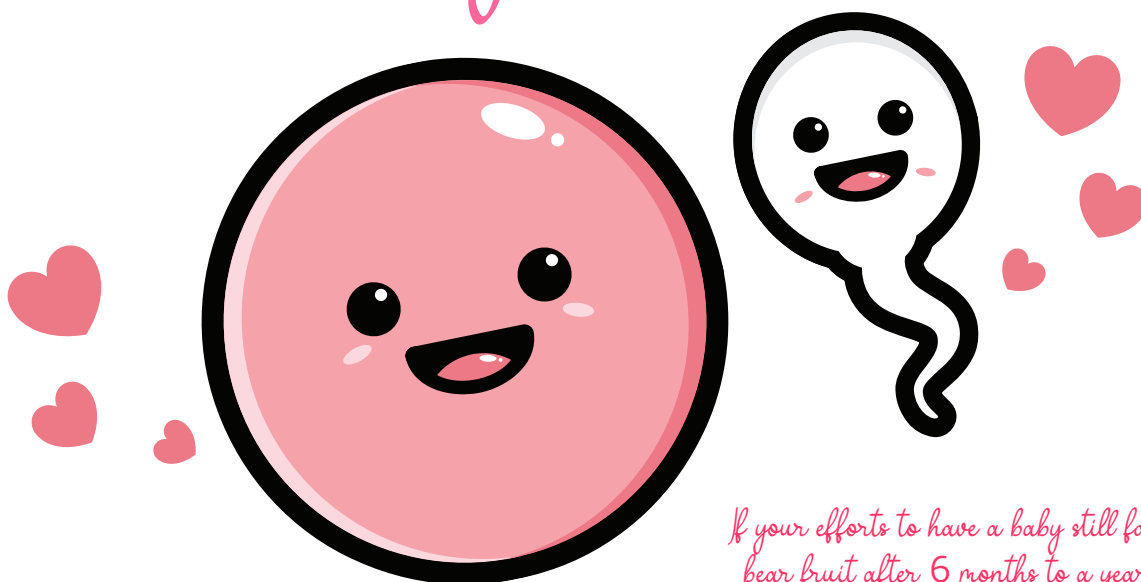


If I keep trying with my partner but still can't have a baby, what can we do?

After 6 months to 1 year of lack of success despite regular unprotected sex, it may be a good idea to visit a fertility specialist. We will talk about fertility treatments next.

A TRIP TO THE

fertility clinic



If your efforts to have a baby still fail to bear fruit after 6 months to a year of trying, it may be time to seek some assistance from a fertility specialist.

What's a fertility specialist?

A fertility specialist is an obstetrician and gynaecologist (O&G) who has further undergone specialized education and training in diagnosing and treating fertility-related conditions. Therefore, they are also capable of performing the services of an O&G in addition to providing fertility treatments.





How can a fertility specialist help you?

Typically, they offer these services:

Thoroughly assess you and your partner to determine the causes that may be holding you back from being parents. This is typically conducted through physical examination, laboratory tests as well as by examining your personal history.

Based on the results of your assessment, the fertility specialist will recommend the most appropriate fertility treatment. The type of treatment is on a case-by-case basis, and treatment can range from medications to hormone therapy to in-vitro fertilization.

Because fertility specialists are trained in the ways of the O&G, he or she can also monitor and assist in the delivery of your baby.

Many fertility clinics also has a counsellor or psychologist that can provide advice and support to couples who experience stress and emotional turmoil in their efforts to have a baby.

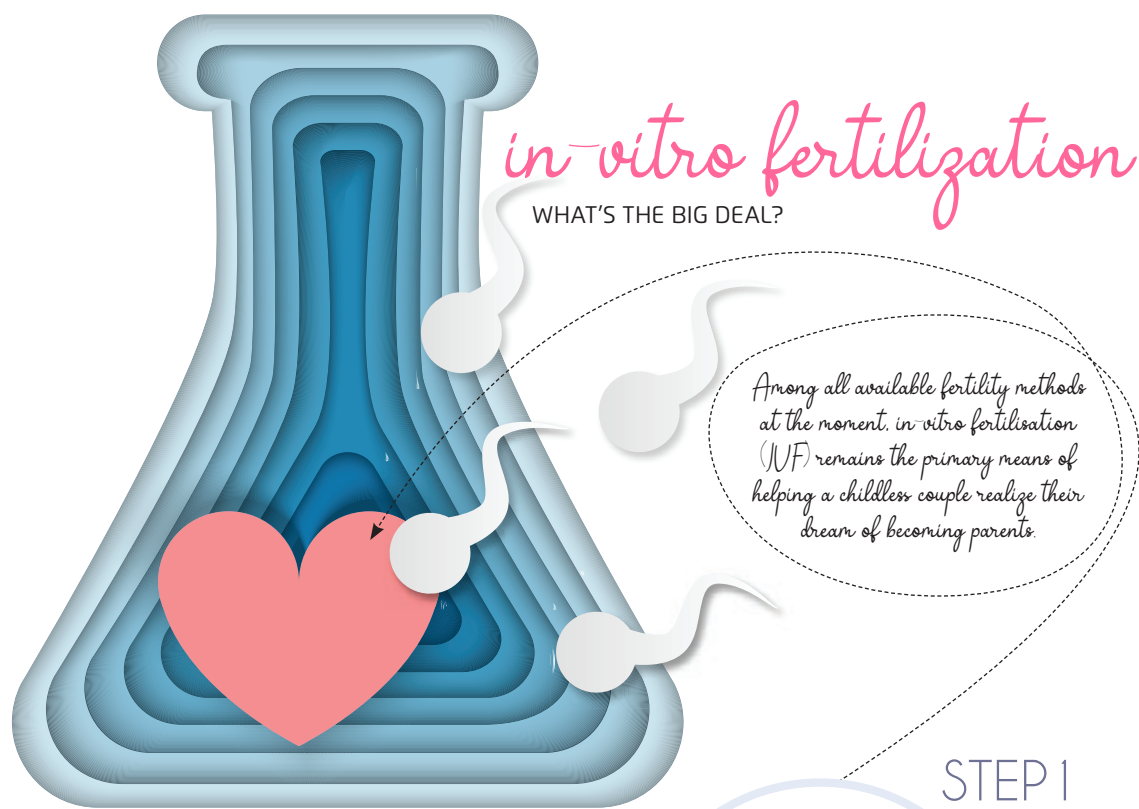
How do I choose the right fertility clinic?

A good place to start would be to look at the track record of the clinic.

- How is the pregnancy rate of their clients?
- Are the staff well-trained and have the appropriate certifications?
- Does the clinic offer additional services such as counselling, payment plans, etc?

However, do bear in mind that the overall success rate of the clinic may not necessarily mean that you will successfully become a parent after engaging their services. Their track record should be taken as an overview of their experience and expertise level.

Also, you and your partner should feel comfortable with the fertility specialist. The road to parenthood via fertility treatments can be a long and emotionally challenging one. You will want someone you can confidently trust and rely on to guide you during the journey.



WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Among all available fertility methods at the moment, in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) remains the primary means of helping a childless couple realize their dream of becoming parents.

STEP 1

**Weeks 1 and 2**

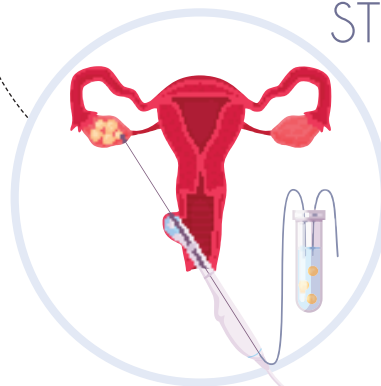
You will be asked to take fertility medications, which can be in the form of tablets or injections, daily (Step 1). The purpose of these injections is to stimulate your ovaries to produce an optimal number of eggs during your cycle.

During this period, you may also have to make a few trips to the fertility clinic for tests and ultrasound. From these tests, your fertility specialist will calculate the time to collect your eggs, and ask you to come back on that day for egg collection.

It's collection day!

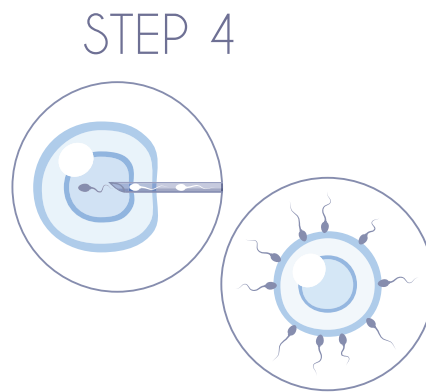
Collect the eggs. You are ovulating on this day, so it's time to extract your egg cells. You will be heavily sedated, and your fertility specialist will insert a hollow needle through the wall of your vagina to extract your eggs (Step 2).

STEP 2

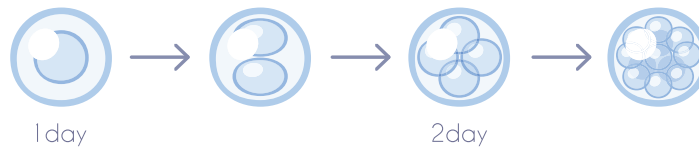


Get the sperm. Meanwhile, your partner will provide his sperm in a far less complicated – think: DIY – manner. Yes, sometimes life can be unfair. In the laboratory, the lab technologist will analyze the sperm sample to select and extract the most healthy-looking ones.

Mix them together. Your egg cells and these sperm cells will then be mixed together in an incubator (Steps 3 and 4). If the sperm cells have problems penetrating the egg wall, the lab technologist would inject sperm directly into the egg in a process called **intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)**.



STEP 5 The fertilized eggs will be allowed to develop further over a few days.



Transfer to your womb. Embryo transfer can be done as a fresh embryo transfer between days 2 or 3 and 5 after egg collection, or as a frozen embryo transfer, which is typically done in the subsequent month once the embryos are frozen.



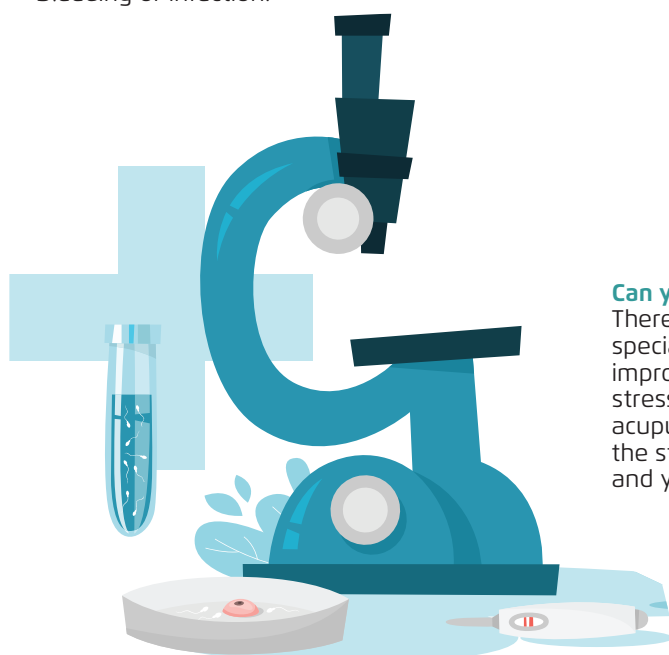
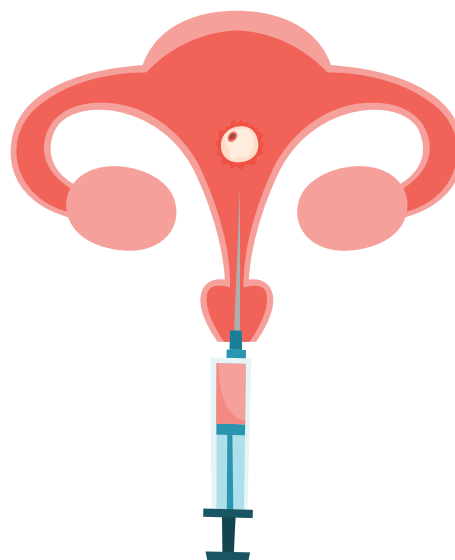
After embryo transfer

The days after the transfer could be frustrating, even nerve-wrecking, as you and your partner would wait for nature to take its course. During this time, you would receive daily doses of progesterone, a hormone that supports implantation and pregnancy, and in about 2 weeks, you would visit your fertility centre for a pregnancy test (Step 7).

ARE THERE ANY *complications?*

IVF carries a small risk of complications, which may include:

- Multiple pregnancy and premature birth.
- Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS). The use of injectable hormones may over-stimulate your ovaries, causing them to become swollen and painful. You may experience nausea, abdominal pain and bloating as a result.
- Bleeding or infection.



Can you increase the chances of IVF success?

There is no scientific evidence to suggest that special diets, bed rests and supplements may improve the chances of success. However, stress relief methods such as massage, yoga, acupuncture, etc may be helpful to help defuse the stress and tension that may arise as you and your partner undergo the IVF journey.

Will IVF always succeed?

Sadly, no. There are many factors that can affect the chances of success, including the age of the woman. The chances of success decrease significantly once the woman is 40 years old or older.



In the next few chapters, we will take a look at age and other factors that can affect the chances of a successful pregnancy, before we wrap up with a chapter summarizing how you should approach your efforts to be a parent after taking into consideration your age and other factors.

WATCH OUT FOR
VOLUME 2
IN THE
SEPTEMBER ISSUE!

HealthToday



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DUA LIPA

RAISES HER VOICE FOR **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**

WORDS **HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG**
DESIGN **HO KAN KEONG**

It's hard to miss Dua Lipa on the radio. Her fiery dance numbers such as *New Rules*, *Blow Your Mind (Mwah)*, and *Levitating* have been dominating the charts ever since she first entered the music scene.

No doubt, the singer's unique husky voice that's often paired with disco-inspired beats and catchy melodies make her stand out from the crowd.

Determined be more than a mere pop-princess, however, Dua Lipa uses her voice of influence to bring up issues that are close to her heart. One such issue is online bullying and its damaging effects on the mental health of young female artists of today.

FOLLOWING HER FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

Powerhouse singer Dua Lipa was born in England in 1995. Her name, 'Dua', means 'love' in Albanian. As a child, she grew up surrounded by music thanks to her father, who was a musician and played in a rock band in his home country Kosovo.

Dua Lipa shared that her father was among her first musical influences.

"He sang in a band called Oda. Music was always played in the house," she said in an interview with *ABC News*.

country, Dua Lipa's parents fled Kosovo to England before starting their family.

Starting over in a land so foreign is never easy, but Dua Lipa's parents were never lacking in determination. They not only managed to provide for their children; they managed to teach their children the value of hard work.

"Watching them work so hard has really been a big part of why I am who I am," the singer said.

Due to the war that took place in their home

FINDING ONLINE SUCCESS

Dua Lipa knew from a young age that she wanted to pursue a career in music. To that end, she attended a weekend theatre school to hone her music skills.

Inspired by the successes of stars like Justin Bieber in being discovered online, Dua Lipa began covering songs and posting them on YouTube. Her online presence eventually captured the attention of a few discerning music producers. Soon after, she received invitations from a few music studios to try her hand at song recording and music writing.

NEW RULES TO GET AHEAD

In 2017, Dua Lipa released her debut self-titled album. The lead single *New Rules* was a hit in the UK and worldwide, catapulting her into being one of the biggest female pop stars of today.



SPEAKS UP AGAINST ONLINE BULLYING

Dua Lipa opened up about being bullied on social media after releasing her first album. She shared in an interview with *Attitude*, "It was definitely something that gave me anxiety and made me feel like maybe I'm not meant to be here and on the stage."

Despite earning herself numerous prestigious awards, including a few

Grammys, the singer still faced harsh criticism online, and that took a toll on her mental health.

To cope with these struggles, the singer made the decision to prioritise her wellbeing. She revealed that she no longer controls her social media accounts—she had handed over those responsibilities to her managers.



AN ADVOCATE FOR BETTER **MENTAL** **HEALTH CARE**

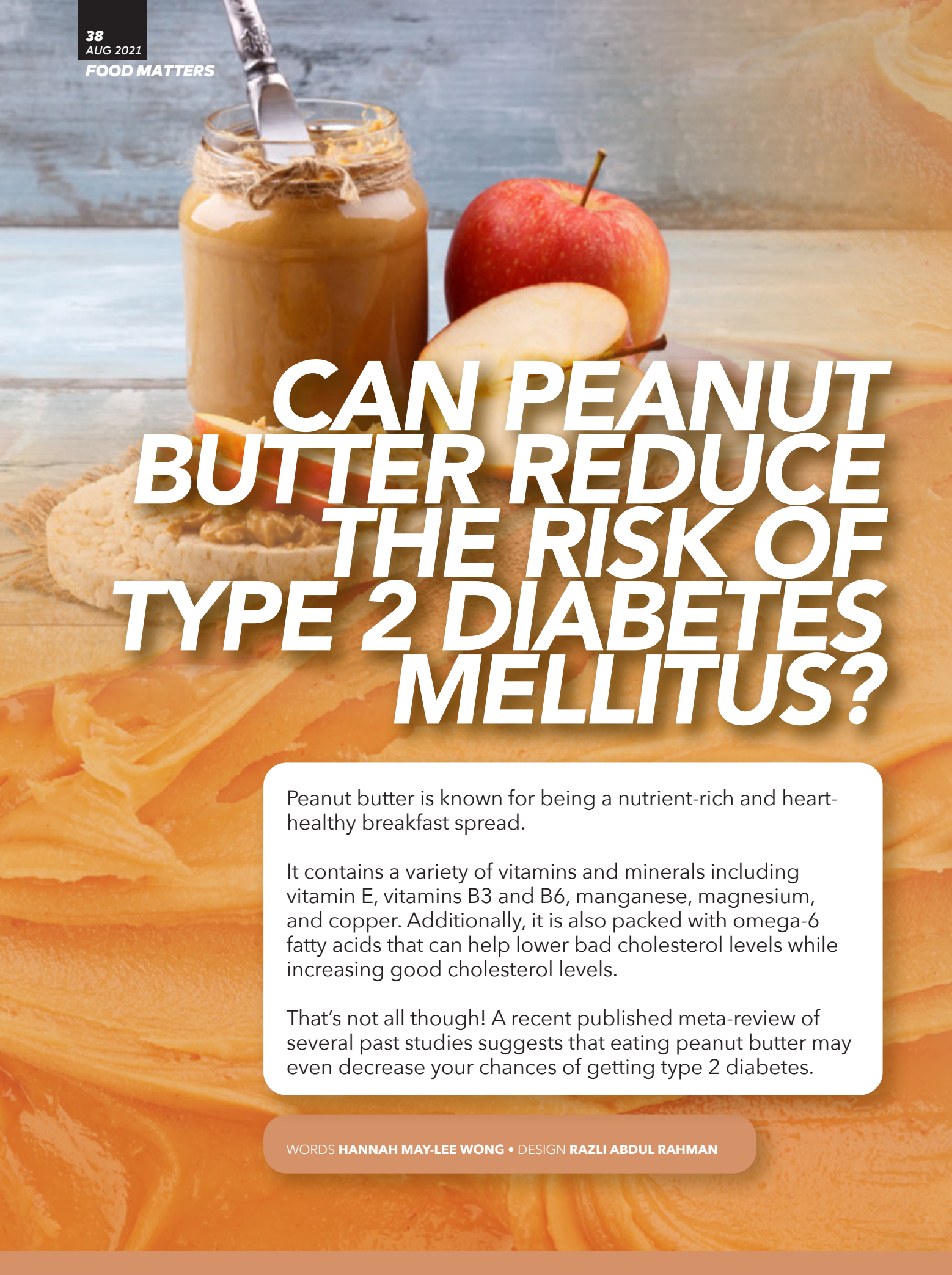
After dealing with her own mental health issues, Dua Lipa called upon a need for better mental health care, especially in the arts and entertainment industry. "It's painfully ironic that music has such power to make us happy but musicians themselves can often suffer disproportionately from mental health issues," the singer said.

She highlighted that female artists had grappled with mental health

issues much more than their male counterparts. "I'm shocked to read stats that reveal suicide rates among women working in the arts are almost 70% higher than in the general population."

At the end of the day, social media is still a useful means for people around to globe to share information and stay connected. However, the singer hopes to promote online as a safe space free of judgement, cancel culture, and hate.

"I see around me every day what others can suffer: the fear of failure, loneliness and the intense pressures of social media, which I think is especially the case for female artists. It's time for the music industry to start taking the mental health of artists seriously."

A photograph of a glass jar filled with peanut butter, a whole red apple, and a sliced apple, all resting on a wooden surface. The background is a blurred blue and white pattern.

CAN PEANUT BUTTER REDUCE THE RISK OF TYPE 2 DIABETES MELLITUS?

Peanut butter is known for being a nutrient-rich and heart-healthy breakfast spread.

It contains a variety of vitamins and minerals including vitamin E, vitamins B3 and B6, manganese, magnesium, and copper. Additionally, it is also packed with omega-6 fatty acids that can help lower bad cholesterol levels while increasing good cholesterol levels.

That's not all though! A recent published meta-review of several past studies suggests that eating peanut butter may even decrease your chances of getting type 2 diabetes.

PEANUT BUTTER & TYPE 2 DIABETES

This meta-review, published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, reviewed and analysed 8 previously published studies in PubMed and Cochrane databases. The goal was to investigate whether intake of peanuts, tree nuts, and peanut butter had any association with the incidence or prevalence of type 2 diabetes.

The analysis found that there was no association between the consumption of tree nuts or peanuts with type 2 diabetes.

However, the consumption of peanut butter was associated with a decrease in risk of type 2 diabetes.

ENJOY PEANUT BUTTER... BUT CHECK THE LABELS!

Peanut butter may be a healthy option to consider the next time you pick a spread for your bread.

However, some brands of peanut butter may have added ingredients such as sugar, vegetable oil, and trans fats—all of which, when consumed in high amounts, can give rise to various health problems.

Hence, check the labels and pick brands that contain all-natural ingredients and little to no additives, trans fats, and sugar.

Oh, and just as with all types of food, enjoy delicious peanut butter in moderation. Too much of anything is never a good thing!

Reference: Becerra-Tomás, N., Paz-Graniel, I., Hernández-Alonso, P., Jenkins, D., Kendall, C., Sievenpiper, J. L., & Salas-Salvadó, J. (2021). Nut consumption and type 2 diabetes risk: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *The American journal of clinical nutrition*, 113(4), 960–971. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa358>

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BIRTHMARKS

WORDS **HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG**
DESIGN **HO KAN KEONG**



Birthmarks can come in different shapes, colours and sizes. Most are not harmful and don't need to be treated—they can become one of the many physical features that make a person unique. However, some may choose to remove them out of personal preference or cosmetic reasons. In rare cases, some birthmarks can be a sign of an underlying health issue.

In this article, consultant dermatologist Dr Ch'ng Chin Chwen will discuss the issue of birthmarks and how they can be removed.



DR CH'NG CHIN CHWEN
Consultant Dermatologist
Subang Jaya Medical Centre



WHAT ARE BIRTHMARKS?

The term 'birthmark' describes any mark on the skin that a person is born with. Most birthmarks appear at birth, but some can develop a few weeks after birth.

WHAT CAUSES A BIRTHMARK TO OCCUR?

Dr Ch'ng explains that they mostly occur at random. "Despite what some superstitious people would claim, the appearance of birthmarks in a newborn baby has nothing to do with what the mother did or didn't do during pregnancy."

Some birthmarks are caused by an excessive accumulation of pigment cells or melanin in the skin. Other birthmarks can appear lighter than the rest of the skin due to a lack of melanin. Certain birthmarks are caused by an overgrowth or malformation of a tissue such as a blood vessel.

Birthmarks are not hereditary; they can't be passed on from parent to child.

SHOULD YOU BE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR BIRTHMARK?

Most birthmarks are benign (non-cancerous) and hence, are not a cause for concern.

That said, certain birthmarks carry a small chance of turning cancerous.

"The risk of that happening in a young child is very low. However, people with birthmarks should keep a close eye for any changes in colour, texture, or size of their birthmarks," Dr Ch'ng says.

She adds, "It can be hard to tell whether a birthmark is growing bigger, as most birthmarks grows along with the child. However, once the child enters adulthood, the birthmark should not grow any more. If it grows any further, the person should visit a dermatologist and have it checked."

WHICH BIRTHMARK ARE YOURS?

MONGOLIAN SPOTS

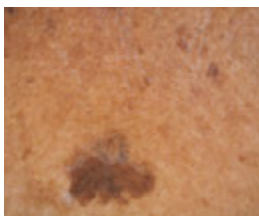


Mongolian spot.

Mongolian spots are commonly seen among Asian babies. These appear as blue-grey patches on a baby's body, usually on the buttocks.

Mongolian spots usually get lighter when the child reaches 3 to 5 years old and eventually disappear.

CAFÉ AU LAIT SPOTS



Café au lait spot.

These are brown or light cappuccino-coloured patches that can appear on any part of the body.

"Most times, these birthmarks can be left alone. However, if the patient has more than 6 café au lait spots,

it's best to consult a dermatologist. A large number of such spots may be a sign of another underlying health issue, particularly neurocutaneous syndromes," Dr Ch'ng says.

Neurocutaneous syndromes are congenital conditions that affect the skin and the central nervous system. Dr Ch'ng further adds that they may lead to seizures and other health problems later in life. Hence, these syndromes should be detected early.

NEVUS OF OTA & NEVUS OF ITO



Nevus of Ota.

Nevus of Ota and Nevus of Ito birthmarks appear brown or black.

"These types are predominantly distributed on visible areas such as the face or the neck. If a child has

these birthmarks, most parents may choose to remove them when the child is still young—before the child enter any child care facility or kindergarten," Dr Ch'ng shares.

These birthmarks do not harm the patient's health. However, when children with birthmarks go to school, they might encounter difficulties fitting in due to their appearance. This may affect them psychologically.

VASCULAR BIRTHMARKS



Salmon patch birthmark.



Port wine stain birthmark.

Vascular type birthmarks are common.

Salmon patch birthmarks appear as faint red or pink areas on the skin. They usually fade away as the child grow older.

Port wine stain birthmarks appear darker red in colour and have a rounded and well-defined border. These don't typically fade away on their own—some get darker and lumpier with age.

"Some port wine stains that have a certain distribution on the face can be a sign of an underlying rare congenital syndrome. Dermatologists would be able to detect this special distribution of birthmarks. If a syndrome is suspected, the child would have to undergo further diagnostic tests for confirmation," Dr Ch'ng says.

Infantile haemangioma is one of the most common benign vascular skin tumours. They usually appear at first few weeks of life, grow rapidly in the next few months, and then subsequently shrink slowly over several years. However, if a child has a haemangioma that grows too large, a dermatologist might need to treat the child with medications

Dr Ch'ng says, "These birthmarks are also vascular structures. If they grow too big, they may cause an increase of blood flow in an area, thus making the child's heart work harder. In severe cases, it can lead to heart failure."

Dr Ch'ng shares that small infantile haemangioma can be treated with **timolol**, a medication that is also used to treat glaucoma.

For larger ones, oral medicines may be prescribed to shrink the birthmark. Vascular laser (see 'How to Remove a Birthmark') may also be used at the same time.

HOW TO REMOVE A BIRTHMARK



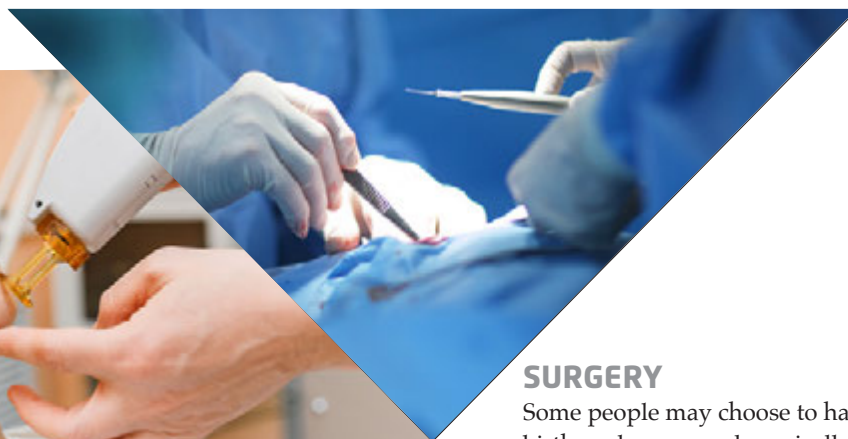
LASER TREATMENT

There are different types of lasers that can be used. The choice of laser used depends on the type of birthmark that is to be removed.

Vascular lasers are designed to remove red or vascular-type birthmarks. They target blood vessels and reduce the blood supply to that area, thereby shrinking the birthmark.

Pigment lasers can generally be used to treat bluish or brown-coloured birthmarks, such as Nevus of Ota or Nevus of Ito birthmarks. Multiple sessions may be needed to achieve the desired result.

Ablative lasers act like a knife to remove the tissue of the birthmark. These can be used on larger birthmarks that can't be easily removed by other lasers.



SURGERY

Some people may choose to have their birthmarks removed surgically. If the birthmark is large in size, it can be removed in stages by a plastic surgeon.

WHICH BIRTHMARK REMOVAL METHOD IS BEST FOR ME?

The method used would depend on the type of birthmark and its size. Those looking to remove a birthmark should consult their doctor or dermatologist to determine which method will suit them best.

TIPS TO MAKE YOUR UNDERARMS

SMELL FRESH & FEEL COMFY

WORDS HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG
DESIGN HO KAN KEONG



The underarms, also known as the axilla or armpits, are often associated with being the sweatiest and most odorous parts of the body. Smelly underarms can make you feel self-conscious, especially while wearing sleeveless clothing.

Thankfully, there are ways keep the underarms feeling fresh, smelling good, and if that is your preference, looking smooth throughout the day. Just follow these few simple steps!



CLEANSE DAILY

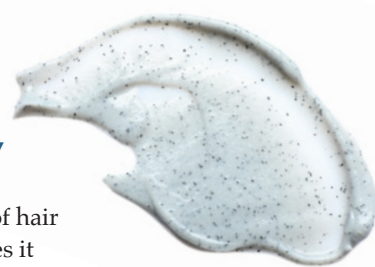
The problem. Body odour arises when bacteria comes into contact with sweat. Because the underarms have folds and many sweat glands, the underarms tend to get warm and moist as you perspire throughout the day. This creates an ideal environment for bacteria to build up.

The solution. The first step in keeping body odour at bay is proper personal hygiene. Wash your underarms thoroughly with soap and water daily to get rid of bacteria that have settled in the folds.

EXFOLIATE OCCASIONALLY

The problem. The abundance of hair follicles and sweat glands makes it easy for dead skin cells to build up in the underarms. Too much build-up of dead skin cells can lead to clogged pores, pimples, and discoloured skin.

The solution. Exfoliate your underarms once or twice a week to slough away stubborn dead skin cells. You can exfoliate manually using a



scrub or exfoliate more gently using chemical exfoliants.

Good options for gentle exfoliants are those that contain alpha hydroxy acid (AHA), beta hydroxy acid (BHA), or polyhydroxy acids (PHA).



USE ANTIPERSPIRANTS AND DEODORANTS

The problem. If you sweat a lot throughout the day, the abundance of sweat will promote growth of bacteria and hence give rise to body odour.

The solution. If you don't sweat a lot, a gentle deodorant will be useful to keep your underarms smelling clean and fresh. Most deodorants have alcohol-based ingredients that increase the acidity of the surface of your skin, thus making it harder for bacteria to grow and thrive. They also contain fragrances to mask unpleasant odours.

If you are a heavy sweater, or deodorants aren't strong enough to address your sweat and body odour issues, consider using an antiperspirant. Antiperspirants contain compounds such as aluminium that temporarily block your sweat pores and reduce sweating.

SHAVE!

The problem. Unshaved armpits could be a cause of body odour, and sometimes washing the area alone isn't good enough to tackle the problem.

A 2016 study found that men who shaved or waxed their underarms before washing the area with soap, experience less underarm odour compared to those who didn't. Hence, waxing or shaving your underarms



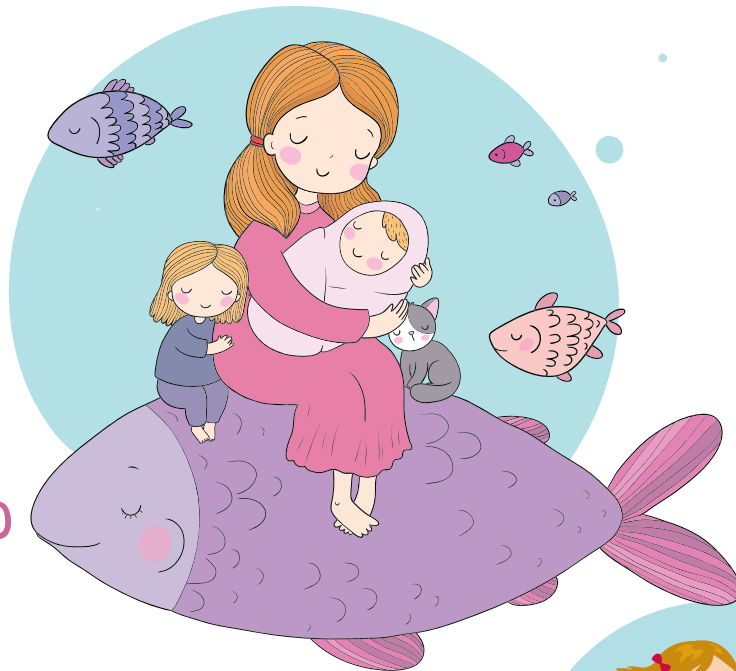
may allow for more effective cleansing of bacteria and dead skin cells with soap and water.

The solution. If you are unsure on how to shave your armpits, there are demonstrations on YouTube to help you get started. Before you shave your arms, first apply shaving cream or moisturizing cleanser in the relevant area. This will help prevent razor cuts or skin irritation.



TIPS ON JUGGLING BETWEEN A BABY AND AN OLDER CHILD

WORDS **JENNIFER F NETTO**
DESIGN **HO KAN KEONG**



Raising a newborn can be a full-time responsibility requiring your attention, but then again, so is raising an older child. If you have both a newborn and an older child, how do you manage your time and priorities to care for the both of them to the best of your abilities? How do you also find some precious time to tend to your own needs as well as your relationship with your partner?

Well, with some planning and perhaps a few deep, steadying breaths now and then, you can certainly do all this and more.

ENROL YOUR CHILD INTO A PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMME

It is good to consider enrolling your older child into a pre-school programme even before your baby arrives.

Spacing their start date away from your delivery may lessen your older child's association of going to school with the arrival of the new baby. Ideally, this timing will help temper any feelings of jealousy that may arise and prevent your older child from feeling shunted off in favor of your baby.

Furthermore, your child will have ample opportunity to channel their energy into learning new skills and making new friends at pre-school. In addition to building their character and providing many learning opportunities, this experience will help reduce their demand for your attention when they are back home.

Pre-school is definitely a win-win decision!

GET YOUR OLDER CHILD INVOLVED WITH RAISING THE YOUNGER SIBLING

Prepping your older child for the big brother or big sister role can inculcate into the older child a sense of responsibility and build up their confidence to make decisions and become independent.

Furthermore, having them involved even in small, simple ways can help them understand that the baby may sometimes need more attention from Mommy and Daddy—thus defusing any sense of jealousy that may arise.

You can start preparing your older child for this role even before the baby arrives, such as by letting them have some say on the new sleeping arrangements once the baby arrives, or demonstrating to your older child how to do simple, age-appropriate chores to help around once the baby arrives.

Age-appropriate chores that your older child can get involved in include singing lullabies and telling or reading stories to the baby before the baby sleeps, folding nappies, and sorting out mittens and booties.

Note that adult supervision is still necessary when your older child is 'taking care' of your baby—you should not leave your children alone together and unsupervised for long periods of time!





SPEND QUALITY TIME WHENEVER POSSIBLE

Whenever possible, arrange for one-on-one time with your older child, such as while the baby is sleeping or when there is another family member or friend assisting you in watching the little one for a while.

Utilize this time well by engaging with your child through board games or books, or even music.

THE VITALITY OF TOUCH

However busy you become with your newborn, never forget to maintain regular healthy physical contact with your older child. Such contact can be done through affectionate gestures such as hugs and cuddles, and regular contact of this nature can promote stronger bonds between parent and child.

This is because research has shown that skin-to-skin contact lets children know that they're safe and protected. Through physical contact, strong attachments can be created as the stable foundation for future relationships.

Furthermore, strong parent-child interactions can foster the development of brain regions that produce the 'tend and befriend' hormone oxytocin. In addition to its many other biological functions, oxytocin is said to increase one's feelings of generosity, forgiveness, trustworthiness, joy and security. Therefore, by continually providing a nurturing touch, you can also foster your child's healthy social, emotional, and physical development.

So, hug and show affection to your older child as much as you can!

SAY HELLO!

Everyone likes to be acknowledged, including children. Consider making it a practice to always acknowledge their presence when they approach you, so that they continue to feel that they belong to the family circle.

You can also address your older child with affectionate designations such as 'kaka', 'akka', or 'jiějiě'—this can also help them feel a sense of responsibility over their younger sibling, as well as a sense of pride over their role as the big brother or sister of your baby.

ASK AND ACCEPT HELP

If you are overwhelmed by your many responsibilities, seek help. Don't hesitate to work the schedule out with your partner or to call on for help from your parents, in-laws, or friends. You can also consider employing a helper to assist with the house work.

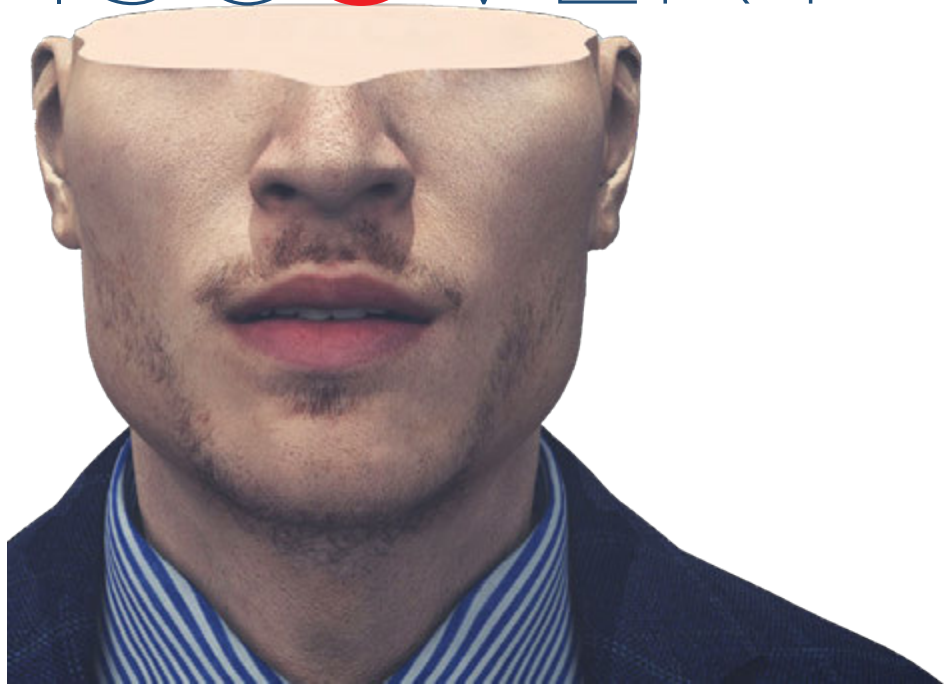
Remember, you don't need to put on a superhero cape and take on everything by yourself. Find way to get some me-time so you are rejuvenated and energized for your family.

So, be willing to ask for help, as well as to accept help when it is offered. Everyone at home will benefit when you are happy and well-rested!



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THE JOURNEY OF

SELF
DISCOVERYWORDS FAITH FOO
DESIGN HO KAN KEONG

“WHO AM I?”

How many times have I questioned my very existence? I have asked myself this question—“Who am I?”—countless times.

I especially question myself back in 2006, when I was 38. I was so caught up with the demands in life that I lost focus of myself. Soon, I was lost in a world of endless demands.

Why is it important to ask ourselves this question? This is because it prompts us to question and examine our identity.



FAITH FOO
Registered & Licensed Counsellor,
EMDR Certified Therapist,
& Director of Abri Integrated Mental Health

Our identity is about how we view ourselves. It's a picture that we create from our subjective reality, one made up of the conditions that we uphold as our truths.

Our identity relates to our values and beliefs that dictate the choices we make; it reflects who we are and what we value.

Our identity is our all-encompassing system of memories, experience, feelings, thoughts, relationships, and values that define each and every one of us. It's the stuff that makes up a "self."

A lot of us define ourselves in terms of our gender, age, vocation, culture, etc.

For example: I'm a Chinese middle-aged female working as a practicing psychotherapist, I am single. In my spare time, I like to cycle in the park. All this information is similar to what we fill up in our CV for a job interview. Ah, but do such information an accurate description of my true self-concept?



In our early development years, our identity tends to be measured in terms of tangibles such as our look, height, academic achievements, etc.

Most of the time, we saw the world not as it is but as who we are. We saw the world with our concept of self that was shaped by our past experiences and interactions with others during our formative years.

As years passed and our life experiences increased, we began to organize a set of characteristics what we identity as being unique to ourselves. Subconsciously, we set up conditions that represent our worth. This worth lies within us and will influence how we see the world. For example: *I must* be successful, *I cannot* fail, *I should* make people happy.

Associate Professor Dr Shahram Heshmat, an expert in the health economics of addiction, once said:

"Few people choose their identities. Instead, they simply internalize the values of their parents or the dominant cultures, such as the pursuit of materialism, power, and appearance. Sadly, these values may not be aligned with one's authentic self and create unfulfilling life."

This is the real issue. Often, our identity was enforced upon us. This inorganic identity causes us to experience a tremendous amount of stress.



WHEN IDENTITY STRUGGLE ARISES

Sometimes, an inorganic identity can be damaging. For example, Jack may value himself as a high achiever. One day, he fails to impress a client, and this failure drives him to feel that he is not getting anything right. This can lead to an inability to cope with the present. Eventually, he may view himself as a failure.

What happens here is that the truth Jack holds about himself—that he is *always* a high achiever—clashes with his experiences—his failure to impress a client—and the resulting emotions such as sadness can create a sense of mismatch or incongruence that may give rise to psychological distress.

Most of the time, damaging beliefs that we hold are subtle; we rarely notice them unless we conduct a self-examination of our beliefs and values. The conflict between an identity shaped by these damaging beliefs and the reality of our circumstances, coupled with the need to find our authentic self, is the cause of much of our unhappiness. This conflict is what we called an 'identity struggle'.

On the upside, people who have successfully found their authentic selves are shown to be far happier

and more content with their lives. This is because they are able to live a life true to their values and pursue meaningful goals.

In Jack's case, should he be able to integrate his own experiences into his self-concept—in other words, the more self-accepting he becomes—the more he is able to understand and accept both himself and other people. In light of his failure to impress a client, he would be able to reflect and conclude: "It's fine that my client doesn't like my idea. I will try to come up with something else that better suit their needs. I can do this!"

So how can we figure out who we really are? How can we separate our true identity from the one given to us by our family and what was shaped by society?

To try to make sense of what was going on in my life at 38, I wrote in my journal the inner dialogues of my 'Old Self', 'Mid Self', and 'New Self'. Eventually, these dialogues crystallized into a clarity that inspired me to share what I have learned in my book 'The 3 S'Elves and the Long To-Do List'.

Here are the steps I found to be helpful in helping us discover our true selves.

Reflect upon yourself. Actively engage with the reflection in the present. Be your own examiner and get down deep to your core. Which areas of your life that you are unhappy about? How can you feel happier about your life? Asking yourself questions and being honest when it comes to the answers can help you better understand where you are in the present—mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Choose who you want to be. Remember you are not seeking perfection. Nobody is perfect! Instead, embrace the idea that there are things that you can and want to improve in order to be a better and happier person.

Make good choices for yourself. Don't make decision out of fear, a desire to please other people, or out of convenience. When you decide to make good choices, it also means you are taking actions.

As clinical psychologist Marcia Reynolds said: "To activate conscious choice, you first have to do some work to determine what really matters to you. What strengths are you proud of? What tasks do you most enjoy? What would you do if you had no obligations or people to please? Take time to sort through your desires."

For example, Mid S'elf in my book dislikes her current work situation. Instead of just being angry, she makes a choice to voice out her discontent, set healthy boundaries, and achieve a better balance in her life. Once she makes decisions that are in line with her values and what she want, she starts to feel more empowered and in control over her own life.

Discover your true passions. The greatest joy about discovering who you really are is discovering those parts of yourself that you never knew about. To understand your passion is to figure out what stimulate your creative energies. For example, if you find that singing gives you a new jolt in life, then go sing!

The more you engage in activities that you enjoy, the more you master that skill. Doing so gives you confidence and competence, which will eventually help you ground your sense of identity.

Place boundaries when it comes to pleasing other people. Ignoring your own needs in order to please other people almost always ends up stirring troubling feelings of estrangement from yourself. You may look into a mirror and think that the person in the reflection is someone you no longer recognize—a stranger even to you.

Instead, you should learn to listen to your inner needs. This is a crucial step to waking up and discovering your true identity—one that truly encapsulates who you are, what you want, what you need, and what you want yourself to be.



In addition to providing professional counselling, Faith Foo is also an author of motivational books for both adults and children. She weaves her advice through relatable anecdotes, parallels to real life, and metaphors as well as allegories both amusing and poignant. Scan the QR code or visit www.faithfoocounseling.com to find out more.





A LADY OF MANY WORDS

WORDS **LIM TECK CHOON**
DESIGN **HO KAN KEONG**

I first met Vanaja Dhanan while writing for a health communications agency a few years back. While we didn't have much opportunity to interact—we were writing for different departments—I was impressed by how this lady had lived such a rich life. She is a writer and an author of children's books, and a proponent of the concept that we are never too old to start anew, live life to the fullest, or pursue one's dreams.

Hence, it is with great pleasure that I am able to share her story, in her own words, with you. Ladies and gentlemen, please meet Vanaja Dhanan.

VANAJA, PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO OUR READERS.

Well, I'm 69 years young. Currently I am the Communications Coordinator at the National Stroke Association of Malaysia (NASAM).



Scan the QR code to read *Strokenews*, the newsletter of NASAM that is authored by Vanaja.

CAN YOU TELL US OF YOUR JOURNEY TO BECOMING AN AUTHOR?

I pursued my higher studies and journalism degree in New Zealand, even worked there as a reporter for a newspaper for a year before I returned to Malaysia in the mid-70s.

My journalism career in Malaysia started at *The Star*. I worked in the features section for about 3 years. During this period, which I would call my 'impressionable years', I learned important fundamental values as a writer as well as a human being that will keep me steadfast in the coming years.

It was also a painful period. I lost my only brother in a tragic car accident. The initial months following his death was a blur, and the tragedy caused my family to fall apart. The onus of supporting my family, especially my ageing parents, through this trying time fell on me. It was clear to me then, how fragile life is and how mine would never be the same again.

YOU SPENT SOME YEARS IN HONG KONG, RIGHT?

Yes! From *The Star*, I moved on to join Leo Burnett as a copywriter. After a few years, I headed out to Hong Kong, which was still a British colony back then. The island was a bottomless barrel of opportunities, and moving there was the right decision, because it gave me some of the best years of my life, especially career-wise.

I started in radio—editing and also broadcasting the news and documentaries—and later transitioned to a television newsroom, still doing the same things. Following that, I found myself in a publishing house where I ended up as a writer for a computer magazine. This was back during the days of the Silicon Valley boom, when computers were huge and would occupy big rooms.

The challenge I faced was to write such that the average man on the street could relate to the new technology. Humanizing the stories and talking to the people behind the software or hardware inventions gave me an insight into the amazing possibilities and inspiring, positive things that we as humans are capable of. It also helped me grow and improve my capabilities as a writer.

My last journalistic stint in Hong Kong was in a publishing house that was responsible for two magazines for cardholders of HSBC. As the editor of these titles, I jetted around the world, first or business class, stayed in premium hotels, and dined in prestigious restaurants. Life was almost magical!

I left that job to invest in a food and beverage outlet with 3 other women. We ran the Bunga Raya Restaurant, which had a bar and a kitchen. Food was mainly Malaysian. I was one of 2 chefs. Lunch was our main food trade and once this was over, we ran the bar into the wee hours of the night. This was hard work, but because I was a people-person, I enjoyed the hours when I wasn't slaving in a hot kitchen!

IT INDEED SOUNDS MAGICAL. SO, WHAT BROUGHT YOU BACK TO MALAYSIA?

After about 2 years running the business and after clocking 10 years in Hong Kong, I returned to Malaysia in the 1990s. I made this decision largely due to my ageing parents—I wanted to be there for them, to care for them.

At this point, career-wise, the only part of mass communications that I hadn't had any experience in was in public relations. Hence, it was only appropriate that my first job upon returning to Kuala Lumpur was with a PR consultancy!

After 1 year, I decided to move on and set up my own consultancy business, offering editorial and PR services. I'm proud to share that, during its 20 years of existence, Dhanan Associates amassed a diverse and respectable portfolio of clients that included banks, airlines, educational institutes, Swiss watch companies, and jewellery houses.

I published my first children's story book *Ben O Comes Home*. That is the start of the new chapter of my career—sharing stories from my imagination with children.

Also, a few years after I returned from Hong Kong, I found a life partner and married. I was nearly 40. My dear husband and soulmate departed in 2019 after a bout of illness, but we had a wonderful life together. I will always miss him, but I will also always cherish the time we had.

The 2000s was also a time for self-discovery. I invested my years of experience into inspiring others to lead better lives, by becoming a life coach and working with various non-profit organisations.

YOU'RE ALSO A BIG PROONENT FOR YOGA.

I was involved in a yoga wellness centre in Bangsar, Yoga2Health. Apart from yoga for adults and children, we offered meditation and a range of energy healing modalities such as Reiki and Sekhem, and even professional help for special needs students.

It shut its doors more than 10 years ago, but while its doors were opened, it touched many lives and I am proud to be part of that endeavor. Even today, I am greeted by people I haven't seen since we closed—they are happy to recount their days at the centre and to re-connect with me.

It was a soul-fulfilling period—helping people live better lives, being able to make a difference and create more harmony in homes was a special, heartwarming feeling. There is no price tag to this feeling.

Eventually, the centre had to be closed due to escalating rentals in Bangsar. Also, I had to be home-bound, to care for my elderly mother who had a stroke.

Until today, I still practice yoga. I also conduct meditation sessions—stilling the mind through sound and visualization—one-on-one or in groups.

YOU'RE ALMOST 70, BUT YOU'RE STILL GOING STRONG. WHAT IS YOUR PHILOSOPHY THAT KEEPS YOU GOING?

Having been through life's ups and downs, I have learned to go with the flow; practice kindness and compassion and be helpful whenever I can. I try to say nothing if there's nothing good to say and, generally, strive to live in peace and with gratitude for my daily blessings which are aplenty. My life is very fulfilling and I am happy.

THE PREVALENT STEREOTYPE OF OLDER PERSONS IS THAT THEY SHOULD BE SEEN, NOT HEARD. OBVIOUSLY, YOU DON'T CONFORM TO THAT STEREOTYPE!

The golden years are a period when you reap what you have sown, in friendships, professionalism, and life in general. It's a time to live life to the fullest, almost like there is no tomorrow.

Fun and action should be the magic words. You shouldn't be a slave to anything except yourself. This is the time to do everything you have wanted to do before. Love yourself. Indulge in yourself.

HOW DO YOU STAY HEALTHY?

I love myself and respect my body.

Currently, this is my health regime: a brisk, short walk in the morning and a longer, leisurely walk in the evenings, daily.

I do short meditations daily. Yoga gives me mobility and I try to practice 3 times a week. At least once a week, I go for Ayurveda therapy and also foot reflexology.

This year, I want to focus on toning my muscles and strengthening my arms and legs. I am also looking forward to exercising in water once the MCO is over. Just speed walking or running and stretching in water, which is very, very therapeutic for seniors.

Additionally, I am fussy about what I put into my body. I am careful because I don't want to live with any health issues. So far, it's been good.

I eat 3 meals a day and drink plenty of water. I have been a vegetarian for more than 15 years now. There's plenty of veggies and fruits in my diet. I also drink coconut water once or twice a week.

STAYING PHYSICALLY HEALTHY IS JUST ONE HALF OF THE EQUATION. HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A POSITIVE OUTLOOK WHEN IT COMES TO AGEING?

By surrendering your wants and leading more of a simplistic life.

As I age, my life gets simpler and I want fewer material things. This way, I stay happy and content.

I advocate leading a simple life. Continue to relate to people who are happy and give you joy. Live with hope, gratitude and faith and have a vision, something simple and achievable.

As you age, you also have more time, so try to give some of this time in service. For example, visit an old folks home and spend time talking to the residents (in view of the pandemic this cannot be done physically, of course, but keep this in mind for later). Connect with ageing friends or relatives via the phone, or go to an animal shelter and see how you can be useful. Be charitable with your time. Be generous and give unconditionally.

YOU ARE ALSO AN AUTHOR OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS. PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT THESE BOOKS.

I am a kid at heart and have a vivid imagination. I can create stories mentally. I also enjoy being around children, entertaining and spending time with them. In fact, I can learn a lot from them. They are so uninhibited, something that I greatly enjoy.

I have written 2 books so far, which are part of the *Come Home* series.



Ben O Comes Home

My first book is a heart-tugging story about courage, trust and good as well as bad adults. Ben O is a puppy that had a rough start in life. He encounters a bully, whom he eventually outsmarts, and with the help of friends finds a new home. The illustrations are both unusual and vividly colourful, striking a chord with children.



Chi Ki Cat Comes Home

A sequel to my first book, this one is about an energetic kitten who seeks amusement, while he waits for friends to join him at play. An unexpected guest appears before him and takes him on a wild, magical trip. Chi Ki is granted a wish and once it is colourfully fulfilled, he finds himself entangled in yet another adventure. This is a tale celebrating the magic of childhood, universal love, and friendships.

Hopefully, there will be a third book in the *Come Home* series. I wrote, published, and marketed the previous 2 books, and now I'm looking for someone to hand over the publication and marketing duties to—this will allow me to focus on enjoying the writing and later, the story telling.

The *Come Home* books are available at Gerak Budaya in Petaling Jaya, Silverfish in Bangsar, and Kinokuniya in KLCC. You can also email chikibeno.stories@gmail.com or call 012-390 2918 for more information on purchasing these books.



MEDITATION & SELF-CARE NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE

WORDS **HANNAH MAY-LEE WONG**
DESIGN **HO KAN KEONG**

Popular singer Harry Styles revealed that he incorporates meditating twice a day into his self-care routine. This practice, he claimed, has changed the life of the former bad boy for the better.

In an interview with *Vogue* magazine, he said:

"It's helped me just be more present. I feel like I'm able to enjoy the things that are happening right in front of me, even if it's food or it's coffee or it's being with a friend—or a swim in a really cold pond."

Styles also shared that meditating improved his mental health and was key in helping him get him through 2020—a tough year for him and many others thanks to the pandemic.

"Meditation just brings a stillness that has been really beneficial."

Aside from meditating, the singer also does Pilates to keep fit. Furthermore, he has been pescatarian for 3 years; he does not eat any other meats other than seafood. "My body definitely feels better for it," he said.

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