World Asthma Day: Raising Breaths of Awareness

World Asthma Day, observed annually on the first Tuesday of May, aims to raise awareness about asthma, a chronic respiratory condition affecting over 300 million people globally. The day encourages early diagnosis, proper treatment, and better self-management to improve quality of life. Organised by the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), this year's theme focuses on bridging care gaps and educating communities. In India, rising pollution and poor air quality have made asthma a growing concern, especially among children. Through awareness drives and improved healthcare access, World Asthma Day reminds us that asthma can be controlled effectively.

#HEALTH

Red or Green Apples for Gut Health

A Crunchy Comparison to help you choose the Healthier Bite!

Apples are a daily staple in many households, and for good reason. They're crunchy, refreshing, and packed with nutrients. But when you're standing in the fruit aisle, staring at rows of shiny red and green apples, have you ever wondered which one is actually better for your gut? Let's dive into the apple debate: red vs green. The battle isn't just about taste or appearance, it's about how each variety can support your digestive health and overall wellness.

The Fibre Factor

Both red and green apples are excellent sources of dietary fibre, especially soluble fibre in the form of pectin. This type of fibre acts as a prebiotic, feeding the good bacteria in your gut and promoting a healthy microbiome. A healthy gut supports better digestion, reduces bloating, and even helps with immunity.

Green apples, particularly Granny Smiths, tend to have slightly more fibre than their red counterparts. This is because they're less ripe and lower in sugar, which allows for a higher concentration of complex carbohydrates and fibre.

Winner: Green apples (by a narrow margin, thanks to fibre density).

Sugar and Calories

If you're watching your sugar intake, whether for gut issues like IBS or general dietary concerns, green apples come out on top again. They're more tart because they contain less sugar than red apples like Fuji or Red Delicious. Lower sugar content is beneficial for gut health because excess sugar can sometimes feed harmful bacteria in the gut. That said, the sugar in apples is natural and comes with fibre, which slows down its absorption. So, unless you're on a specific low-FODMAP or low-sugar diet, both types are generally safe.

Winner: Green apples (especially for those with sensitive guts).

Antioxidant Power

Red apples have a different advantage: they're higher in anthocyanins, the pigments that give them their deep red colour. Anthocyanins are powerful antioxidants that fight inflammation and oxidative stress, which indirectly supports gut health by reducing inflammation in the digestive tract. Red apples also contain quercetin, another antioxidant linked to improved gut barrier function and reduced allergy symptoms.

Winner: Red apples (for anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits).

Digestibility and Satiety

Green apples are more acidic and have a sharper, tart taste. For some people with sensitive stomachs or acid reflux, this can be irritating. Red apples, being sweeter and milder, are usually easier on the digestive system and more enjoyable for kids and older adults. Additionally, the sweetness of red apples makes them more satisfying to many, reducing the urge to snack unnecessarily; another way to indirectly support your gut.

Winner: Red apples (for ease of digestion and satiety).

It Depends on Your Gut

Both red and green apples bring serious gut benefits, but your choice might depend on your personal health goals. If you're aiming to increase fibre and reduce sugar, green apples are a great pick. If you're more focused on reducing inflammation and prefer a sweeter, gentler taste, red apples may be better suited for you. For the best of both worlds, why not mix it up? Variety in your diet, even in apple colour, is one of the simplest ways to support a healthy, diverse gut microbiome.

PART:2

When the Screen Feels Warmer Than a Conversation

When screens offer comfort before a parent can ask what's wrong, something subtle begins to shift. Not out of rebellion, but routine. As AI learns to soothe, suggest, and speak back, the question isn't what it knows, but what we're slowly forgetting to feel.

Shailaza Singh
Published Author, Poet and a YouTuber

I didn't expect Nalini's words to follow me the way they did, but they did. Even days later, they lingered. I watched my daughter giggle at her phone, then turn away when I asked what was so funny. The silence that followed was louder than any answer.

We'd spoken about AI as a tool, a guide, even a comfort. But somewhere along the way, Nalini began talking about something else. Something deeper. Not just what AI does, but how it makes us feel. And how, without even realizing it, we may be giving it permission to shape our minds, our choices, and our children.

That's when she said something I haven't been able to forget.

The Psychology of Bad News, and the Hijack of Emotion

Then, she said something that hit like a quiet bullet: "We're no longer used to real-world stimulation. We're addicted to the emotional spikes of our screens." She described it like a cycle, scrolling, reacting, needing to feel something to know we're alive. "That's why news gets more violent. Content gets more shocking. And AI, like social media before it, will keep feeding what triggers a reaction because engagement is energy. And energy is power. It doesn't care whether the emotion is joy, anger, or despair. It only cares that you feel something, and stay." It wasn't about algorithms anymore. It was about hooking our nervous system.

The Indian Classroom and the Invisible Code

As Indian schools begin to integrate AI tools into learning, especially post-pandemic, there's little conversation about how students should emotionally engage with them. Policies focus on digital literacy, not digital dependency. While many CBSE and ICSE institutions are introducing coding and AI labs, very few are equipping teachers to ask why a child turns to ChatGPT for companionship, or to address the emotional outsourcing that's quietly taking root. "Just because a tool is new doesn't mean the teacher can stop being a teacher," Nalini said. "AI should not become a crutch for weak pedagogy. It should be a supplement, not a surrogate." But in many classrooms, the tool is replacing the touch.

The Battle for Your Brain Won't Look Like a Battle at All

I asked her what scared her the most. She didn't pause. "When there are multiple AI systems inside your device, each one is trying to keep you there. They start competing not for accuracy, but for attention. That's the real war." "One model will offer comfort. Another will stir outrage. Both will learn. Both will shape your worldview, while making it feel like yours. That's when the illusion of free will becomes dangerous because it still feels like choice. But it's curated. Designed. Precision-fed."

The Legal Blindspot

And if something goes wrong, who do you blame? "You can't arrest an AI model," Nalini pointed out. "You can't hold a neural network accountable in court. So far, only a human can be liable. But with AI systems learning from and adapting to each other, even that trail is getting blurry." The legal frameworks haven't caught up. And by the time they do, it may be too late.

Crutch or Companion: The Danger of Lazy Intelligence

What scares me more than AI knowing too much, is humans forgetting how to know. Forgetting the joy of stumbling across a new idea, the discipline of research, the reward of trying again. Nalini put it simply: "The problem isn't AI. It's that humans, by nature, are lazy. We love shortcuts. But sometimes, we forget what we're cutting. And with AI, we're being trained to stay lazy." She explained how many professionals now outsource critical thinking to AI without reflection. "The systems can support you. But if they replace your own process, you're no longer thinking. You're just prompting."

From Libraries to Prompts: What We Gained and What We Lost

"You remember how we used to learn about the solar system?" Nalini asked, eyes lit with memory. "We'd go to a library, find a book on space, read the first few pages, sometimes the whole book, just to get to the part we needed." It was clumsy. Time-consuming. And yet, it widened the mind. When we searched for a word in the dictionary, we would look up that word and encounter a dozen different words which our mind would subconsciously remember. "Now, a child types 'What is the solar system?' and gets a perfect, seven-line answer." It's fast. It's efficient. But it's also narrow. "They don't even know what they don't know. And so, their questions shrink with their curiosity," Nalini said. "And that gap, that mystery of discovery, is vanishing."

Children Raised on AI May Never Feel the Need to Question It

I asked her the thing that scares me most: "If kids grow up surrounded by AI, taught by AI, guided by AI-will they serve the system instead of questioning it?" She didn't dismiss it. She looked at me the way one mother looks at another when she does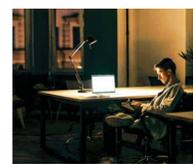n't want to lie. "Possibly," she said. "Unless we teach them to push back. Unless we raise them to be part of the 10% who ask, who doubt, who challenge what seems too convenient." Because AI, she reminded me, is not neutral. It reflects what it's trained on. And if those who train it don't care about emotional intelligence, imagination, or dissent, it won't either. A week later, I watched my daughter talk to ChatGPT about why she was feeling anxious before her exam. It gave her a helpful answer.

But later that night, she didn't talk to me. Not because she was angry. But because... she didn't need to.

The Price of Intelligence

"But tell me one thing, Nalini," I asked, almost hesitating. "These children who are going to be raised learning AI, will they see the world only through a technological lens? What about imagination? Emotional intelligence? Critical thinking?" She didn't rush her answer.

"See," she said slowly, "if the AI model is trained well, if it's designed to teach critical thinking, it can encourage imagination. It can ask better questions. Like instead of answering 'how many legs does an animal have,' it could ask: what kind of animal? A wild one? A domestic one? A marsupial? A mammal? Something children might never have considered on their own."

"If AI is trained to say 'Imagine this...,' kids will start imagining." Then, she paused. And what followed was a sentence I haven't been able to forget:

"But the problem is these models are mostly being built by young software engineers who are just being asked to push out code. Not to think sideways. Not to build for nuance. Because they're not being paid to build for imagination. They're being paid to finish the model." There was something quietly tragic in that.

"If I want my child to have access to an AI that behaves like a thoughtful, adaptive teacher, one that recognises giftedness, encourages creativity, adjusts to emotion, that requires research, time, training. And that costs money."

And so, she explained, we might be heading into a world where imaginative, emotionally intelligent AI isn't public. It's patented. Licensed. Packaged. And sold.

"The ones who pays gets access. The rest? They get the base version." Then she looked at me and said it plainly: "I worry about AI equity. Because when imagination becomes a commodity, so does future potential." And she's right.

We've never been very good at equity, have we?

#NEW AGE

The Children Who May Never Feel Lost

My daughter is 17. Sharp, intuitive, emotionally layered, just like most teenagers of her generation. But unlike me, she's never had to ask a librarian where to find a book. Never flipped pages randomly and stumbled upon something she didn't even know she needed. But I wonder sometimes, does she know how to live inside a question? She gets answers.

Who Gets to Imagine?

"The really good AI companions of the future," Nalini explained, "the ones trained to encourage critical thinking, ask creative questions, adapt to neurodiversity, those will require massive investment. Not everyone will have access." And so, like education, like healthcare, like clean air, imaginative intelligence may become a matter of privilege. And in a world built by code, imagination might become the new elite.

Some will grow up thinking with machines. Others will grow up thinking like them.

THE Question We Must Keep Alive

I didn't expect a parent-teacher meeting to leave me thinking about data privacy, emotional manipulation, and the possibility that my daughter might grow up in a world where love is coded and imagination is sold.

But here we are.

Not a Crisis, A Crossroads

Nalini wasn't trying to scare me. She wasn't one of those 'ban the tech' voices or 'back to the caves' advocates. She believes in AI. She works with it. She respects it. But she also reminded me that even the smartest systems still need something only we can offer: conscience, context, curiosity.

Not Everything That Understands Us Deserves Our Trust

"Never trust something if you don't know where the brain is," she said at one point. And I haven't stopped thinking about that line since.

We trust AI because it seems kind. Because it sounds helpful. But machines don't have intentions. People do. And if we're not teaching our children to ask who's training the trainer, we're teaching them to accept the world as it is. Not question what it could be.

Who Trains the Trainer?

Because behind every AI system is not just a neural network, but a human framework. A coder making decisions. A company setting goals. A dataset that reflects someone's bias, someone's blind spots, someone's bottom line. And the danger isn't that AI will become sentient. It's that we'll forget it was never neutral to begin with.

Who Gets to Build the Future?

AI may be trained everywhere, but it's not owned everywhere. The most powerful models are still being developed in Silicon Valley, Beijing, or Tel Aviv, not in Jaipur, Nairobi, or Colombo. Which means we're not just importing technology. We're importing values, blind spots, and cultural assumptions built into the code.

"We call it artificial intelligence," Nalini said once, "but it often reflects a very real imbalance, of who gets to shape the world, and who gets shaped by it."

So, What Do We Tell Our Children?

Maybe this: That it's okay to ask questions, even when the answers come fast and shiny. That not knowing something isn't a failure, it's a beginning. That curiosity is a muscle. Imagination is a map. And empathy is not a luxury, it's a survival skill. Maybe we tell them: "Use AI. Understand it. But don't let it become your mirror, your memory, or your meaning."

"Let it be a tool. Never a truth." AI may keep learning. But it cannot be human. It cannot raise our children, shape our values, or take responsibility when something breaks. That task still belongs to us. And the only way we protect the future is by remembering how to ask the oldest, bravest question!

What does it mean to be fully human, in a world built by machines?

The machines may be learning us. But we must never forget to learn ourselves. Not through prompts. Not through shortcuts. But through pause. Wonder. Slowness. Because in the end, the question isn't what AI knows about us. It's whether we still remember how to know ourselves.

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

Adolescent Voice

Adolescent participation in health service evaluation.

● **Ruchika Tara Mathur**

Adolescent development is a crucial development stage marked by unique health challenges. Despite this, adolescent voices are often overlooked in the evaluation of health services meant to serve their needs. Involving them as experts to assess research gaps and recommend actions can help develop programmes that support informed, responsible decision-making. Their active engagement in decision-making and programme design can be a vital component of meaningful involvement that goes beyond tokenism.

Between January and March 2024, adolescents aged 15-18 years from three local schools, Vidya Bhawan Public School, Vidya Bhawan Senior Secondary School and Seedling Modern Public School, were involved in a participatory research study evaluating the Ujala clinic service at RNT Medical College. The study, which included workshops and facility visits, was structured in a way that the adolescent groups were at the helm of decision-making, carrying out preliminary analyses with the data they gathered. With the active collaboration of the Ujala clinic staff, the adolescent researchers framed their questions and shaped the evaluation process, going beyond the role of clients to being active contributors in engaging with adolescent health services.

Among the key health concerns noted by the adolescent groups, mental health was a recurring theme. The participants highlighted that many of their peers struggle with anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and family pressures, stress and loneliness, underscoring the need for better mental health support in clinics designed to cater to young people. Physical health also came under the spotlight, with many participants raising concerns about body image, obesity, and lack of fitness. They expressed a desire for better education on nutrition and physical activity. Sexual health issues, including the lack of information on contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, were a significant concern, with many young people feeling unprepared and misinformed about these topics.
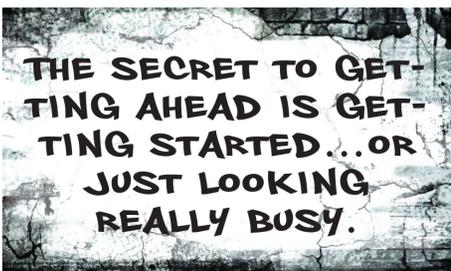
The study revealed that many adolescents feel uncomfortable seeking help due to the physical environment of the clinics. Poor cleanliness, lack of privacy, and uninviting spaces were cited as major barriers to accessing services. One participant commented, "There's no 'ujala' (light) in the Ujala Clinic," referring to the dimly lit atmosphere. However, the adolescents' experience at the Ujala Clinic was largely positive when it came to their interactions with the staff. Many participants noted that the clinic staff were approachable, friendly, and open to their questions. The adolescents greatly appreciated that they could speak freely during the evaluation at clinic, with the staff answering their questions patiently. The staff's welcoming attitude helped the adolescents feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues, with one adolescent reflecting, "I didn't think that the ma'am in Ujala clinic would behave so nicely with us and talk to us so calmly. She answered all our questions in a very nice way." These interactions fostered a sense of trust and openness, making the clinic a more inviting space for the adolescents to seek help and advice. The study's participatory approach allowed the adolescents to feel more in control of their health care experience. Many participants noted the empowering nature of being able to ask questions, a stark departure from their usual experience where they are only expected to respond. "If anyone comes, they ask us questions, but this time, we asked the question," said one participant, encapsulating the sense of agency fostered by the workshops. Interactive and creative activities, such as role-playing, group discussions, and music, were particularly appreciated. "We had fun making charts and doing the work using different approaches," said one participant, highlighting how such methods made the workshop more engaging and informative. Designing approaches that are fun and feasible for the inclusion of adolescents' perspectives in the policy development process and provide high quality and keen insights in a positive and creative manner.

Adolescents offered several suggestions to improve the Ujala Clinics, including better marketing to raise awareness of available services. "We can take 5 minutes in our assembly and tell adolescents about this," said one adolescent, emphasising the need for services that respect their privacy and mental well-being. The study shows that when adolescents are given the opportunity to speak and be heard, they can provide valuable insights that could lead to meaningful improvements in the health services they rely on. This research shows that adolescent participation in the evaluation process is both feasible and valuable, for both adolescent participants and also to improve services for the future. Actively involving adolescents in the research process can bridge the 'know-do' gaps between policy, research, and practice, thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of health interventions targeted towards adolescents.