

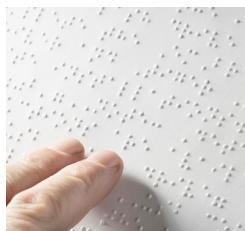


In this Issue

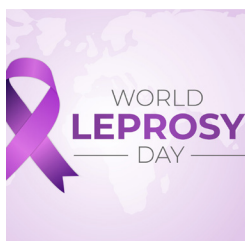
Embracing Health Life Choices



World Braille Day – 4 January



World Leprosy Day – 28 January



Embracing Healthy Life Choices in the New Year

The arrival of a new year is a powerful reminder of fresh beginnings. Whether prompted by January 1st, a milestone birthday, or simply the changing seasons, we all crave opportunities to reset, reflect, and rejuvenate. These transitions offer the chance to embrace healthier choices that enhance our well-being and enrich our lives. Here are seven practical ways to make the most of the year ahead and foster a healthier, happier you.

Commit to Physical Fitness

You don't need to transform into an athlete to reap the benefits of physical activity. Setting realistic goals can make all the difference. Consider signing up for a 5K run or simply committing to twice-weekly walks in your local park. Even everyday changes—like biking instead of driving for nearby errands—can build momentum. The key is to create a sustainable routine that works for your lifestyle that you are more likely to pursue, regularly.

Maintain Your Health Proactively

Amid our busy lives, health check-ups often fall by the wayside. Don't let this year slip by without scheduling those essential medical visits. Annual physicals, eye tests and routine screenings are vital for catching issues early and staying in top form. Encourage loved ones to do the same—because good health underpins everything we aspire to achieve.

Prioritise Quality Sleep

Sleep is the cornerstone of good health. Studies show that adequate, restorative sleep helps maintain a healthy weight, lowers the risk of heart disease and diabetes, and boosts cognitive clarity. This year, resolve to establish a consistent bedtime routine, create a sleep-friendly environment, switch those digital devices off well ahead of bedtime and give your body and mind the rest they need to thrive.

Make Learning a Lifelong Habit

Learning keeps the mind sharp and the spirit vibrant. Challenge yourself with activities that engage your

brain—like mastering a new language, picking up a musical instrument, or diving into a creative hobby like digital photography or crafting. Research highlights how these cognitively demanding pursuits improve memory, especially as we age. Never stop exploring new skills - your brain will thank you.

Take Time for Yourself

Self-care isn't selfish—it's essential. Dedicate moments to activities that bring you joy and promote balance. Whether it's staying hydrated, eating well, practicing mindfulness or engaging in a favourite hobby, carving out personal time for yourself boosts your physical and mental health and enhances self-esteem.

Strengthen Connections

Nurturing relationships with family and friends are as crucial as taking care of yourself. Plan regular gatherings, make time for meaningful conversations and prioritise shared experiences. These human connections are a source of joy, support and resilience.

Celebrate Your Successes

Acknowledging achievements, no matter how small, reinforces a positive mindset. Whether you've reached a fitness milestone, mastered a new skill or simply stayed consistent in your efforts, take the time to celebrate and acknowledge what you have achieved. This fosters motivation and keeps you moving forward with confidence.

As you embark on this journey of renewal, remember that small, consistent changes often yield the most profound results. By embracing these healthy habits, you're not just enriching the year ahead—you're laying the foundation for a lifetime of well-being. Remember, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Let this New Year be one of personal growth and vitality.

<https://www.mediclinic.co.za/en/infocenter/corporate/healthy-life/good-sleep-is-essential-for-good-health.html>

A graphic for World Braille Day. It features a dark blue background with a faint world map. On the left, a large yellow number '4' is positioned above the word 'JANUARY' in white. A vertical white line separates this from the right side, where the words 'WORLD' and 'DAY' are in white, and 'BRAILLE' is in large yellow letters.

4 JANUARY WORLD BRAILLE DAY

World Braille Day

4 January 2025

The world observes World Braille Day on 4 January, a day dedicated to recognising the pivotal role of braille in improving the lives of blind and visually impaired people. The day coincides with the birth anniversary of Louis Braille (1809–1852), the ingenious inventor of the tactile writing system that bears his name.

The Origin of Braille

To appreciate the transformative power of braille, we must journey back to its roots.

Louis Braille was a Frenchman who tragically lost his sight as a child due to an accident. Determined to overcome the barriers imposed by his blindness, he sought a means of reading and writing that would empower blind individuals to communicate and access knowledge independently.

At the age of 15, inspired by a system called night writing, he devised a tactile code based on the French alphabet. **Night writing**, developed by Charles Barbier, was originally intended for soldiers to read messages in the dark without light. It used a 12-dot grid to represent letters and sounds. However, its complexity made it impractical, as readers could not discern the entire pattern with a single fingertip.

Louis Braille simplified this system into a six-dot cell, creating a format that allowed users to quickly and efficiently identify letters, punctuation and even numbers. This innovation proved revolutionary.

The Development of Braille

Louis Braille published the first version of his tactile writing system in 1829, which included not only text but also **musical notation**. He later refined it in 1837, releasing a revised version that became the first binary writing system in the modern era.

Braille's work extended beyond inventing his code. He became a teacher at the **National Institute for Blind Youth** in Paris, where he

taught subjects like algebra, grammar, music and geography. Remarkably, he was the first blind individual to serve as both an apprentice teacher and a full professor at the school, further demonstrating his commitment to empowering the visually impaired.

Braille Today

Braille is far more than just a method of reading and writing—it is a key to independence, education and inclusion for millions of blind and visually impaired individuals worldwide. From books and signage to technology like braille displays and keyboards, this tactile system continues to open doors and bridge gaps.

How to Celebrate World Braille Day

World Braille Day serves as a reminder to promote accessibility and inclusivity for blind individuals. Here are some ways to mark the day:

- **Educate:** Learn about the history of braille and its impact on society. Share this knowledge with others.
- **Advocate:** Support policies and initiatives that enhance accessibility in public spaces, workplaces and educational institutions.
- **Donate:** Contribute to organisations that provide braille resources and training for visually impaired individuals.
- **Innovate:** Explore how technology can further integrate braille into modern tools and platforms.

By honouring Louis Braille's legacy, we can continue working toward a world where accessibility and equality are the norm for all.

To find out more, visit: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/braille-day>

World Leprosy Day

28 January 2025

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a **neglected tropical disease (NTD)** that continues to impact lives in more than 120 countries. Each year, over 200,000 new cases are reported globally, highlighting the urgent need for education, early diagnosis and treatment to combat this preventable and treatable disease.

What Causes Leprosy?

Leprosy is caused by two closely related bacteria, **Mycobacterium leprae** and **Mycobacterium lepromatosis**, with the latter being identified as recently as 2008. These bacteria primarily affect the skin, peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract and eyes. Though the disease has a lengthy incubation period—sometimes up to 20 years—its slow progression offers opportunities for early detection and treatment.

How Does Leprosy Spread?

Leprosy is transmitted primarily through **prolonged respiratory contact**, such as sustained exposure to an untreated person's respiratory droplets. Unlike common misconceptions, it is not spread by casual contact, such as handshakes or hugs. People undergoing treatment rarely transmit the disease.

In some regions, zoonotic exposure presents an additional risk. For instance, **armadillos** are the only known animal reservoirs of leprosy-causing bacteria. Handling, capturing, or farming armadillos increases the risk of infection, though the exact mechanism of transmission between animals and humans remains unclear.

Recognising Leprosy

Leprosy often begins subtly, making early detection challenging. Initial symptoms may include:

- **Skin changes:** Patches of whitish or reddish skin with reduced sensation.
- **Thickened skin:** Sometimes with nodules.
- **Nerve damage:** Loss of sensation or muscle weakness in the hands or feet.

Without treatment, leprosy can cause severe deformities, nerve enlargement and facial changes, such as eyebrow loss or nasal

deformities. Despite its potential to cause disfigurement, leprosy is curable and its progression can be halted with timely intervention.

Challenges of Stigma

One of the greatest barriers to controlling leprosy is the **stigma and discrimination** attached to the disease. Misunderstandings about its transmission have discouraged individuals from seeking medical help, perpetuating the cycle of undiagnosed cases and further transmission.

Treatment and Hope

Leprosy is highly treatable with **multi-drug therapy (MDT)**, provided free of charge by the World Health Organisation. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent complications and halt the spread of the disease. Efforts to combat leprosy include:

- **Vaccine development:** Promising clinical trials suggest that a vaccine may soon bolster global efforts to eradicate the disease.
- **Screening programs:** Organisations like the Bombay Leprosy Project and the Armauer Hansen Research Institute are improving early detection and treatment.

Global Action Against Leprosy

The World Health Organisation (WHO) launched a comprehensive plan in 2021 to achieve **zero leprosy**. This initiative emphasises proactive measures, such as community education, stigma reduction and increased healthcare access, particularly for vulnerable groups like migrant and impoverished populations.

World Leprosy Day: A Call for Awareness

Observed annually, **World Leprosy Day** aims to dismantle misconceptions about the disease and highlight the fact that leprosy is bacterial, not hereditary, and entirely curable. Raising awareness is essential to ensure that affected individuals seek help without fear of judgment. By addressing stigma, enhancing medical outreach and supporting research, the global community can work together to make leprosy a thing of the past.

Awareness, compassion and action are the keys to unlocking this reality.



WORLD
LEPROSY
— DAY —

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