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[Soil Eating, a Very Dangerous Habit](#)

From Bangladesh



Human habits are extremely diverse worldwide. But some really leave you stunned. And while we are searching for remote galaxies and worlds in the sky, some things seem to belong to other worlds. You can imagine the shock of Shamsunnahar Hena, a gynecologist in a Bangladesh hospital, when her pregnant patient said she had been eating half a kilogram (1.1 pounds) of soil every day since she got pregnant. An increasing number of pregnant women in Bangladeshi Sylhet region, more famous for its tea plantations, are consuming charred soil, which according to the local tradition, it boosts their appetite and health, translated into the delivery of a healthy child. But soil eating is a very dangerous issue (imagine that the anthrax bacteria and [others](#) resist for years in the soil) and that soil is just scorched. "Often we get pregnant women complaining of dysentery and some other problems, but in most cases they are found guilty of eating soil," Hena told Reuters. The habit is also fueled by many poor and jobless people, who collect and burn mud to sell it at up to 120 taka (\$ 1.7) per kg (\$ 0.77 per pound). "Normally they eat a piece or two in a day, but recently I got a patient who confessed to eating half a kilogram of soil every day during her pregnancy period," said Hena, the chief gynecologist in Sylhet's Osmani Medical College. "Usually the husbands or father-in-laws of the expecting women buy the soil for their wives. The markets sit through the day, from dawn to dusk," Mainul Bulbul, a local journalist, told Reuters. It is hard to explain the popularity of the habit as many Bangladeshi women receive more instruction and work outside their homes, being more aware of health issues. "Medical science never supported that idea, but instead says eating soil would reduce their hunger and sometimes causes infection," signaled Hena. Ugandan chimps are known to eat soil that appears to improve their antimalarial fighting ability. The soil activates chemicals from the leaves of *Trichilia rubescens*, a plant representing one of the preferred food items of the Ugandan chimps. Other animals eat dirt when stressed or as a source of missing minerals. Some African tribes use clay against diarrhea.