

Eat smart, eat healthy

Finding ways to sustain a healthy eating habit.

By Dr TEE E SIONG

HEALTHY eating means consuming meals that are balanced – they contain the main food groups in appropriate amounts.

It also means eating a variety of food items and consuming meals in appropriate serving sizes.

Healthy eating certainly does not mean following a diet that is rigid, eating only certain types of foods. It does not mean only eating foods that are not tasty and are expensive.

You may hear some people lamenting that it is challenging to have a healthy diet. They will claim that they face many obstacles, such as insufficient time for breakfast and lack of healthier food choices when eating out.

These challenges are not insurmountable. The way to overcome these perceived challenges is to eat smart. Be committed and disciplined and you will find ways to overcome these challenges.

Let's discuss some of the obstacles here and how to conquer them.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It replenishes the body with energy and vital nutrients after a night of sleep.

For children, it is imperative that they eat breakfast to enable better learning and improve school performance. In addition, eating breakfast helps to prevent overeating at the next meal and therefore helps to maintain healthy body weight.

There are several things you can

do so that you and your family members can have breakfast. Instead of giving excuses, make time and try the following tips to help you prepare a healthy breakfast.

- Very often, there is only a short time available in the morning. It is therefore wise to prepare simple breakfasts. They can be just as fulfilling and nutritious.

- The key is to prepare ahead. Some ingredients can be prepared the night before to save some time in the morning.

- You can also stock-up some healthy breakfast food choices such as cereals, oat meal or muesli, a cup of yogurt or small packet of milk, and fruits such as banana and apple.

- You can even cook extra the day before and pre-pack them for easy preparation and consumption the next day. All you need is just a few minutes to reheat the foods.

- For children, you can prepare their breakfast in a container for them to bring to school to eat while on the way to school or before the school starts.

Most working adults may have at least one of their meals eaten outside every day. It can have serious detrimental health effects if one continues to choose unhealthy foods that are prepared with high fat/sugar/salt every day for a long period of time.

Thus, it is imperative that working adults make wise food choices when dining out.

It is entirely possible to have healthier choices if one makes a



People mistakenly think that healthy eating is expensive. In fact, you can easily eat healthily on a budget with some smart shopping tips. — Filepic

serious effort to do so. Do consider the following tips when eating outside:

- When buying mixed rice/“chap fan” – avoid deep fried or oily dishes and opt for grilled/steamed foods; ask for brown rice and choose more vegetables; choose fish dishes more often, and also more legume products (eg soya bean products).

- When ordering your dishes – go for clear-soup based instead of fried; double the vegetables in your dish; ask for less oil, salt and sugar; drink plain water instead of sugary beverages.

Additionally, you can prepare home-cooked meals in advance and bring your lunch to the workplace. All you need is just few minutes to reheat the meals.

A canteen that serves healthy food choices can help to ensure children eat healthily during recess.

However, one of the challenges in shaping healthy eating habits among school children can be the type of foods being sold at the school canteen.

Parents can help to overcome this challenge by several simple ways.

- Parents can play a more active role in ensuring that canteens offer healthier food choices more often, eg through the Parent-Teachers Associations. They can help ensure

that the school canteens adhere strictly to the canteen guidelines.

- They can prepare and pack healthy snacks for children to bring to school instead of buying food at the school canteen.

- Parents can teach children from young about healthy food choices so that they can select healthier options.

People mistakenly think that healthy eating is expensive. In fact, you can easily eat healthily on a budget with some smart shopping tips. Always list out your groceries in advance and avoid the temptation to buy items not on your list in order to keep your budget on track.

Always go for fresh local produce as they are usually cheaper than the imported ones.

Always choose to home-cook your meals. Home-cooked foods are not only cheaper, they are always healthier as you get to control the ingredients used as well as the condiments such as salt and sugar that are added into it.

Always remember to practise the basics of smart eating in order to overcome the obstacles to healthy eating.

The above are just some examples of smart eating as ways to overcome the challenges. You just need to remember the basic principles of smart eating, which is to practise balance, moderation, and

variety (BMV).

This means that you should eat a balanced diet that contains foods from all five food groups in the Malaysian Food Pyramid, eat moderately (follow the recommended number of servings per day for each food group), and maintain a diet that consists of a variety of foods that meet your nutritional needs.

Be disciplined. Eat smart. You and your family will reap the benefits and reduce the risk of nutrition-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancers.

Dr Tee E Siong is President of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia. This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2016, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly-organised by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Dietitians' Association and Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity. To obtain more information on healthy eating and active lifestyle, visit NMM's Food-Fit-Fun Fair at Ground Floor, Centre Court Concourse, 1 Utama Shopping Centre on Wednesday to Sunday, April 6-10, 2016. Visit www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my or Nutrition Month Malaysia Facebook page for more information.