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THE prevalence of obesity in Malaysia is as high as 17.7%, while 30.0% of Malaysians are overweight, as reported in the 2015 Malaysian National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS).

Unfortunately, this problem is not isolated to just adults, as the prevalence of obesity among children is also high.

In 2010, the Nutristudy Project conducted by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM) reported about 16%, or one in six, children aged four to six years, were overweight or obese.

Another study by NSM in 2013 called the MyBreakfast study showed that 28%, or one in four, primary school children were overweight or obese.

These worrying results mean that we need to take immediate action.

Obesity is a direct result of one's lifestyle, which includes unhealthy diets or eating habits, and a sedentary lifestyle that is lacking in physical activity.

In order to combat overweight and obesity problems in our country, Malaysians should start being more physically active every day.

Food represents energy intake, and only by balancing it with one's energy expenditure through physical activity can we achieve energy balance.

Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer, as well as maintaining healthy weight, thus preventing overweight and obesity.

Being physically active every day is a necessary component of a healthy lifestyle and it improves your physical and mental health.

A simple method to achieve this is to walk more.

Regardless of your choice, whether it is to work out in a gym, in your home or outdoors, there are some basic physical activity principles that should be followed in order to make the most of your workout.

**Getting FITT**

An easy-to-follow principle used to assess the effectiveness of your physical activities is the FITT Principle.

FITT is short for:

- **Frequency:** how often do you do physical activities, e.g. three days in a week.

- **Intensity:** how hard are the physical activities (low, moderate, or high intensity), e.g. jogging in the park can be made more intense by adding in short sprints or maintaining the pace uphill.

- **Time:** how long each session lasts.

- **Type:** which type of physical activity, such as cardiovascular (e.g. running), strength training (e.g. using weights), or flexibility and balance (e.g. yoga).

Remember that doing some physical activity is better than none.

If you are inactive, it is never too late to start with small amounts of physical activity as part of your daily routine and gradually increasing the frequency, intensity and duration over time.

**Making it work for you**

Before you start, you should know your current fitness level first in order to proceed to make a more concrete physical activity plan on how you can go about achieving your goal.

For instance, you can find out your current fitness level by taking



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# Moving for health

Be more physically active if you want better health.

FITT explained			
Frequency	Intensity	Type	Time
Everyday	<b>Light intensity</b> Get moving and be physically active	Walking, light housework, taking the stairs as much as you can	Regardless of the intensity, perform all types of physical activities in bouts of at least 10 minutes in order for it to be beneficial for cardiorespiratory health. Remember to choose a level of activity that is comfortable and safe for you.  <b>Aim for this</b> > <b>Children = 60 minutes</b> of moderate intensity physical activity daily > <b>Adult = 30 minutes</b> of moderate intensity physical activities on at least five to six days a week, preferably daily > <b>Elderly = 30 minutes</b> of moderate intensity physical activities on at least five to six days a week, preferably daily
5-6 times per week	<b>Moderate intensity</b> You can still talk and walk without panting	Aerobic or cardio types of activities are examples of moderate-intensity exercise that are beneficial for your cardiovascular health - brisk walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, hiking, playing badminton	
3 times per week	<b>High intensity</b> You have to pause for breath to say more than a few words	Vigorous cardio-type activities - fast cycling, walking briskly up a hill, playing basketball	
2-3 times per week	<b>Varying intensity</b>	Activities that increase strength, flexibility and endurance - weightlifting using dumb bells, stretching exercises, tai chi, yoga, push-ups, distance bicycling	

a walk (or a jog) for one kilometre, then take a quick check of the time you took, your pulse rate and your breathing rate.

Do take note of any other signs your body may be sending you as you walk (e.g. muscle aches, joint pains) and adjust your speed accordingly.

Take note of your breathing and slow down if you feel any difficulties in catching your breath.

If you want to get started with weights, be sure to start with light weights and work your way up; aim for a weight that you can handle throughout the training routine, while still keeping your movements slow and controlled.

As you progress and improve, you can either opt for a heavier

weight or increase the number of repetitions.

You can also work on your flexibility by doing simple stretching exercises, e.g. try touching your toes or see how far past your toes you can push the tips of your fingers.

Who says physical activities has to be boring?

There are plenty of ways to make it fun and exciting.

If you are into sports, you can join a group of like-minded friends to play football, futsal, badminton, tennis or squash.

Other physical activities that can be done alone or with other people include swimming, cycling, jogging, or even walking.

For people who absolutely can-

not stop watching television, you can even perform some physical activities while watching TV by getting on a treadmill, elliptical machine or stationary bicycle.

There is really no reason why you should be sitting still for an hour when you could easily squeeze in some physical activity.

Above all, don't neglect the importance of warming up before any major activities and cooling off after.

**It takes practice**

Getting started is easy, but the real challenge is in staying motivated to continue.

Take the first step to be physically active every day by making

small changes to your daily routine.

You can park further from your destination so you can walk more or take the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator - every little bit counts!

Once you have become accustomed to this, you will find that what you once thought was a chore is now nothing more than a daily routine.

Prepare yourself to mentally accept the responsibility for feeling and being healthier by making the necessary commitment to be more physically active.

Remember to cut yourself some slack and approach physical activities with a "growth" mindset and think of it as a skill, i.e. it may be something you are bad at in the beginning but you will get better with time.

Being overweight or obese does not mean that something is wrong with you, it just means that you have to do something about it.

Precautions should be observed, especially if you are already suffering from some form of chronic disease, such as hypertension, heart disease, or diabetes.

You should always remember that a healthy lifestyle involves eating healthy, being physically active and having enough sleep.

Dr Zawiah Hashim and Dr Chin Yit Siew are council members of the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO). This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2018, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly organised by NSM, the Malaysian Dietitians' Association (MDA) and MASO. To obtain more information on healthy eating and active lifestyle, visit [www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my](http://www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my) or the NMM Facebook page.