

**By the NUTRITION MONTH
MALAYSIA 2014 STEERING
COMMITTEE**

AS a nation, we are losing the battle of the bulge. According to a 2010 survey by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Malaysia held the dubious distinction of being the fattest country in South-East Asia.

Not only do we outweigh our Asean neighbours, we also rank as the sixth fattest folks in the whole of Asia.

Dr Tee E Siong, president of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM), says: "Findings from the NHMS (National Health and Morbidity Survey) show that the obesity rate in the country has increased by almost three and a half times from 1996 to 2011.

"This indicates that approximately one in two Malaysian adults is either overweight or obese."

Two of the most common non-communicable diseases (NCDs) obesity has been linked with are diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

The NHMS 2011 found that some 2.6 million Malaysians were suffering from diabetes.

This figure represents an increase of more than half a million compared to the 2006 NHMS.

In addition, one in three Malaysians have high cholesterol and/or high blood pressure.

These medical conditions are risk factors for heart disease, which has been the number one killer in Malaysia for the past 30 years.

Prof Dr Winnie Chee, president of the Malaysian Dietitians' Association (MDA), emphasises: "Not only has obesity levels increased in Malaysia, so has the prevalence of other NCDs.

"Since one in two Malaysians are either overweight or obese, and being overweight or obese is known as a risk factor for NCD development, it is not a surprise if half the population of Malaysia is already suffering from one form of NCD or another, yet remain unaware or completely ignorant of it."

The root of the problem

Why is this happening? Excessive weight is a big risk factor for NCDs.

According to Prof Dr Norimah A Karim, vice-president of the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO), being overweight or obese is something that does not happen overnight.

"It typically occurs over a period of time, and the main causes are unhealthy eating habits and practices.

"By frequently consuming more than is needed by the body and subsequently not using the consumed energy through physical activity, there is a large excess of unutilised energy.

"What does the body do with this unused energy? It will be stored as fat, and this gradually leads to overweight and obesity," she notes.

Let us examine some common factors that can contribute to our expanding waistlines:

● **Unhealthy eating habits/practices:** Many Malaysians have bad eating habits and a tendency to indulge in unhealthy foods.

There is a high tendency to overeat, and lack of control over portion or serving sizes, and Malaysians frequently make unhealthy food choices – foods that are high in fat, sugar and calories.

● **Insufficient exercise:** NHMS 2011 showed that 35.7% of Malaysians do not exercise at all.

Leading a sedentary lifestyle is a precursor to health problems such as overweight or obesity, which then leads to other NCDs.

Exercise is a key component in

Eat right, move more

In conjunction with Nutrition Month Malaysia 2014, we are carrying a series of four articles relating to nutrition matters. This week, we look at how unhealthy eating habits and a sedentary lifestyle are major causes of obesity.



Two of the most common non-communicable diseases that obesity has been linked with are diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. – AFP

achieving healthy weight. Engaging in physical activity means burning calories, and the more intense the activity, the more calories you will burn.

Being physically active and exercising goes a long way toward balancing out your food intake versus your energy expenditure.

● **Other factors:** Ageing is also associated with weight gain as muscle mass typically diminishes with age, while fat increases.

Loss of muscle mass is linked to weight gain as it decreases the rate at which your body uses calories.

Excessive alcohol consumption can also result in weight gain. This is because alcoholic drinks are high in calories and contain hardly any other nutrients.

Prof Norimah says: "What is needed to have successful weight loss is discipline and determination. Weight loss should be gradual, and as a general guide, it should be around 0.5kg to 1kg per week.

"Even just losing at least 7% of your body weight (7kgs if you weigh 100kgs) and exercising moderately (such as brisk walking) 30 minutes a day, five days a week can actually lower your risk for type 2 diabetes by more than half.

Fighting the flab

Malaysia is geared for a nationwide battle against obesity. Focusing on obesity prevention and weight management, the upcoming Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2014 Programme will start with the "Eat Right, Move More: Fight Obesity" Family Carnival on March 29 and 30 at the Mid Valley Exhibition Centre (Hall 1), Kuala Lumpur.

Now in its 12th year, NMM contin-

ues to be spearheaded by the same three professional organisations that founded it, namely, NSM, MDA and MASO.

This programme aims to spread awareness on healthy living through activities such as carnivals, roadshows, and a series of health-related publications.

With all these initiatives, Malaysians should become more aware that unhealthy eating practises and a sedentary lifestyle or lack of physical activity will have serious detrimental consequences to their health.

While obesity can lead to NCDs, both of which are bound to badly affect your quality of life, they are preventable, and in the case of obesity, reversible.

Malaysians should therefore take positive steps immediately to adopt healthy eating habits and be active every day so as to prevent obesity, thereby reducing their risk of NCDs.

■ **NMM 2014 is supported by** Gardenia Bakeries (KL) Sdn Bhd, Legosan Sdn Bhd (OatBg22), Malaysia Milk Sdn Bhd (Vitagen), Nestle Products Sdn Bhd and Yakult (M) Sdn Bhd. To learn more about preventing obesity and other interesting nutrition information, visit the Nutrition Month Malaysia Family Carnival at the Mid Valley Exhibition Centre (Hall 1), Kuala Lumpur, on March 29 and 30. There will be free nutrition screenings, expert advice from nutritionists and dietitians, exciting activities, and much more. For more information, call 03-5632 3301, drop by the Nutrition Month Malaysia Facebook page or visit www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my.

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