

By Dr TEE E SIONG

Recipe for a healthy family

In conjunction with Nutrition Month Malaysia 2017, here are 10 tips that can help you prevent common lifestyle diseases.

OVER the past 20 years, the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) has increased markedly. The situation has prompted the Health Ministry to implement various programmes to combat NCDs. The fact remains, however, that despite any programme, real effects can only be made if you yourself take action.

After all, NCDs are linked to one's lifestyle and unhealthy practices increase your risk for these chronic diseases, including unhealthy eating, avoidance of physical activity or delaying health screening.

Here's how you can start preventing NCDs in 10 simple steps:

1. Remember BMV

It is easy to get carried away and eat to your heart's content, but this can lead to the consumption of additional calories and fats, which your body does not need. It's time to seriously relook your total food intake daily and what you put on your plate.

- Use the Malaysian Food Pyramid as a guide to your daily intake.

- When you plan your daily meals, the My Healthy Plate concept is an excellent guide to follow, especially in portioning the amount of different foods for each meal.

In case you are wondering what BMV refers to, it is "Balance, Moderation & Variety", which simply means eating a balanced meal with moderate portions that contain a variety of food types.

2. Eat more whole grains

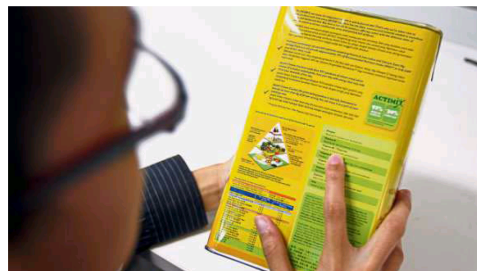
Whole grains and whole grain products have many health benefits, including helping to reduce the risk of certain NCDs such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and even some forms of cancers.

Whole grains are packed with essential nutrients, especially several B vitamins and minerals such as iron, zinc, magnesium and selenium.

They are also rich in dietary fibre and numerous phytonutrients, many of which function as antioxidants.

- Start with breakfast by selecting whole grain breakfast cereal, oats, or whole grain bread and biscuits.

- For lunch, try brown rice vermicelli, soba, noodles made with



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whole grain flour, or oats instead of the usual noodles.

- For dinner, try brown rice. For a start, mix your brown rice with white rice.

3. Increase fruit and vegetable intake

Fruits and vegetables are packed with nutrients, dietary fibre and phytonutrients that you need for a healthy body.

- Follow the My Healthy Plate recommendations – make sure half of your plate consists of fruits and vegetables, and take different types every day.

- Start with breakfast. Oats or cereals with fruits are a fantastic combination to start your day.

- For lunch, start by filling your plate with vegetables when ordering your mixed economy rice.

- Hungry between meals? Munch on fruits instead of reaching for unhealthy snacks.

- During dinner, you can make your own mixed salad.

4. Reduce fat intake

Consumption of high-fat foods can lead to a higher risk of heart disease, which has remained the number one cause of death and hospitalisation in Malaysia for several decades now.

- Use cooking methods that use little to no oil, i.e. steam, bake, grill, braise, boil or microwave.

- Limit your intake of deep-fried foods, opt for stir fried or the healthier choices mentioned above.
- Trim off excess fat and/or skin from any meat or poultry before cooking them.

5. Reduce use of salt and sugar

Sugary foods and drinks contribute to unnecessary calories.

Many of these foods are also well-seasoned with salt, and the high consumption of such foods will increase your risk of hypertension.

The key is in maintaining a balanced use of both sugar and salt.

- When cooking at home, use herbs or spices for flavour, instead of sugar or salt.

- When ordering drinks outside, always make it a point to request for less sugar or just drink plain water.

- Limit your intake of sugary foods, e.g. ice cream, sugary confectionery items, sugary beverages, etc.

- Buy fresh meat/poultry/fish instead of processed ones – manufacturers will normally add salt.

- If you bake your own cakes/cookies, you can experiment by using less sugar.

6. Eat on time regularly

People with busy schedules or those on so-called weight loss diets may opt to skip meals. This is a myth and you should certainly avoid such practices.

- Consume three balanced main meals according to schedule every day, namely, breakfast, lunch and dinner.

- If you are in a rush in the morning, have a bowl of whole grain cereals or oats with milk or ready-to-drink cereal beverages.

You can also eat whole grain sandwiches in the car while stuck in traffic (whole grains promote longer satiety).

- Keep healthy snacks on hand such as fruits, nuts or wholemeal crackers. It helps to curb hunger pangs between meals and discourages overeating at the next meal.

The take-away message is: Do not skip meals!

7. Eat out wisely and cook more often

Home cooking is the ultimate way of controlling not only the ingredients you eat but also the cooking method.

When eating out, you will have to be more careful about what you order as there are still some options that are healthier than others.

- Sharing is caring – most restaurants offer portions that are large enough to share. If sharing is not an option, then separate the food when it arrives so that you can take away whatever you can't finish.

- Beware of sugary drinks – these can contribute a significant amount of unnecessary calories.

8. Read nutrition labels

With such a wealth of options available, grocery shopping has become a lot more complicated.

The onus is on the consumer to make wiser choices and the best way you can do that is by paying attention to the various information on the food packaging, specifically, the nutrition information panel

(NIP). The NIP is the only way that you can compare the nutrient content of different products and you can even use it to compare brands before making your choice.

9. Be active

Most Malaysians lead a sedentary lifestyle, so it is important to get yourself active and moving all day, any time, anywhere, every day. Physical activity and exercise are just as important as eating healthily to prevent diseases.

10. Go for regular screening

Take the time to go for regular health screening as this will help you nip any potential problems in the bud.

Carry out more frequent regular checks for the main risk factors of NCDs, e.g. BMI (body mass index), blood glucose level, BP (blood pressure), HDL-C (high-density lipoprotein cholesterol) and LDL-C (low-density lipoprotein cholesterol).

For individuals above 40 years of age, it is highly recommended you carry out a comprehensive health examination annually, which should include several blood and urine tests.

Leading a healthy lifestyle does not mean that you need to lead a monkish life.

You can still enjoy the foods you like. The important thing is not to overdo things.

Dr Tee E Siong is president of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia and chairman of the Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) Steering Committee. This article is contributed by NMM 2017, an annual community nutrition education initiative. To obtain more information on healthy eating and active lifestyle, visit NMM's Food-Fit-Fun Fair at Lower Ground, Centre Court Concourse, IOI City Mall, Putrajaya, on April 19-23. Nutrition screening and counselling is available for free and lots other goodies are up for grabs. Visit www.nutrition-monthmalaysia.org.my or NMM Facebook page for more information.

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