

# Let's eat smartly

Numerous studies have shown that unhealthy diets coupled with physical inactivity are the culprits that contribute to the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, heart disease, obesity and cancers.

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**N**UMEROUS studies have shown that unhealthy diets coupled with physical inactivity (sedentary lifestyles) contribute to the incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, heart disease and cancers.

To prevent NCDs, we need to go back to the basics. A healthy diet, together with consistent physical activity, is the key to overall health and well-being.

Start off with simple little changes that you can easily incorporate into your current lifestyle.

To help you reach your goal of a healthier lifestyle, here are some key principles to prevent these diet-related diseases.

**Learn the B-M-V concept of healthy eating**

Healthy eating is actually as simple as eating regular meals that provide the proper combina-

tion of nutrients and energy that your body requires. A simple concept to remember is Balance, Moderation and Variety. A basic guide that you can use to achieve your B-M-V is the Malaysian Food Pyramid.

Tips when using the pyramid:

- Balance your meals by eating food from all five food groups in the Food Pyramid.

- Eat in Moderation – follow the recommended number of servings for each group. In terms of quantity, you should eat more foods from the bottom level, while items at the tip of the pyramid should be eaten sparingly. If done correctly, this will help prevent overeating.

- Ensure that you eat a Variety of foods from each food group to get all the nutrients you need.

**Limit intake of fats and cholesterol**



The Malaysian Food Pyramid guide is a useful tool to help you eat more healthily.

To prevent  
osteoporosis,  
**Vitamin D**  
is as essential  
as calcium



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# Moderation is important

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There are three types of fat which we consume:

- **Saturated fats** – predominantly found in the fatty part of meat and poultry (eg skin), ghee, butter, coconut oil or coconut milk.

Recommendation – saturated fats should be taken in small amounts as excessive intake can clog arteries. It can also raise cholesterol and triglyceride levels, which are risk factors for heart diseases.

- **Unsaturated fats** (polyunsaturated or monounsaturated) – can be found in nuts, seeds, fish, and vegetable oils (such as soya bean oil, sunflower oil, and palm oil).

Recommendation – this type of fat makes a better choice as they provide vitamins, antioxidants, and essential fatty acids that our body can't produce. Therefore, we must get these essential fatty acids from our diet.

- **Trans-fats** – made when liquid vegetable oils are made into solid through the process of hydrogenation. Trans-fats are commonly found in shortening, margarines, high-fat baked goods, crisps, and commercialised deep-fried products.

Recommendation – trans-fats should make up only 1% of your daily calorie intake. It raises your cholesterol levels, and is also linked with a greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Fat is energy-dense, thus excessive

consumption can lead to obesity – 1gm of fat gives you double the energy of 1gm of carbohydrate.

It's recommended to limit fat intake to around 20%-30% of the total energy requirement per day (equivalent to 44-67gm of fat or about three to five tbsp of oil for a normal adult eating 2,000 calories a day). So, avoid foods that are deep-fried in oil, and trim away as much visible fat from meat as you can.

## Less sweet always

Like fat, sugar is also energy-dense, so eating too much results in excessive energy intake. This may contribute to obesity, especially if you do not balance your calorie intake with adequate physical activity.

Obesity is a proven risk factor for NCDs. As a general guide, no more than 6-10% of your total energy intake should come from sugar, and this works out to approximately eight teaspoons a day.

Reduce the intake of drinks that have sweetened condensed milk/creamers, or carbonated drinks. Instead, drink plain water, or ask for coffee/tea without sugar.

If you love baking, reduce sugar by as much as half the amount listed in the recipe without affecting the texture or taste of most baked foods.

## Less salt, more spice

Sodium (the main component in salt) is naturally present in many foods. Salt is a commonly used seasoning or flavour enhancer that we tend to use excessively in food

preparation.

Numerous studies have shown that over-consumption of salt can lead to high blood pressure (hypertension) and/or heart disease.

According to the Malaysian Adult Nutrition Survey (MANS, 2003), it was reported that the average sodium intake of Malaysian adults was about 30% above the recommended intake.

Therefore, limit your sodium intake to less than 2,000mg per day – about a teaspoon of table salt. Watch out for foods high in salt and sodium. Instead of reaching for the salt shaker, use other herbs or spices instead. These will serve to add zing to your foods without risking your health.

Sauces, condiments and processed or preserved foods are high in sodium. Thus, when buying these foods, pay attention to words containing "sodium" on the food label (eg sodium chloride, monosodium glutamate, sodium nitrate, etc).

At home, you can enhance your cooking and still keep it healthy by using less salt; substitute with home-made chicken stock, or local herbs and spices, eg cinnamon, nutmeg, parsley, *serai*, *dauin purut*, *ketumbar*, etc.

## Get your daily dose of fibre

Fibre facilitates the smooth functioning of the digestion process, and this helps reduce constipation, which indirectly reduces the risk of colon cancer.

It also aids in stabilising blood glucose levels, which leads to a



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reduction in your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Other than that, fibres like beta-glucan (found in oats) help lower your total blood cholesterol levels. This will eventually reduce your risk of getting heart disease.

Fibre generally helps in weight management. It also has the added benefit of sating your feelings of hunger more quickly, and satiety lasts for a longer time.

Our diet should contain 20-30 grams of dietary fibre daily.

Here are some tips to help you achieve the recommended intake:

- Start the day right; have some wholemeal bread, whole oats or whole grain cereal for breakfast.

- Have some brown rice or wholegrain pasta for lunch or dinner. Start by replacing half of normal non-whole grain foods with whole grain versions.

- Feel like having a snack? Have a serving of fresh fruits or chickpeas instead.

- Thirsting for fruit juices/concentrates? Go natural! Eat more whole unpeeled fruits instead.

- Want to make a great tasting soup/gravy that's healthy as well? Rather than using corn flour to thicken soups and gravies, add whole grains such as oats or whole-

meal flour instead.

When it comes to meal preparation, the method of cooking will influence how healthy a meal is. Choose dishes that have been cooked using healthier methods such as stir-frying, grilling, roasting, braising, stews/soups, baking or steaming. Avoid deep-fried foods as much as possible.

Don't be afraid to try new recipes or ways of cooking. There are many ways to prepare a healthy meal which is delicious.

■ *This article is courtesy of Nutrition Month Malaysia 2013, an annual community nutrition education programme by Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Dietitians' Association and Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity. The Nutrition Month Malaysia "Eat Right, Be Active: Stay Free From Diet Related Disease" Family Carnival at the Mid Valley Exhibition Centre (Hall 1) will be held on Friday and Saturday, May 3 and 4, 2013. There will be free nutrition screenings, expert advice from nutritionists and dietitians and other exciting activities. For more information, call 03-5632 3301, drop by the NNM Facebook page or visit [www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my](http://www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my).*