

8 Food For Thought

STARHEALTH, SUNDAY 7 APRIL 2019



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HAVE you ever gone for a workout where the person next to or back/front of you is either belching or farting continuously? And it smells unpleasant?

Kopi ginseng, ginger, asparagus, garlic, durian ... these "fragrances" waft through the air, along with body odour and perfume.

It turns me off, but I try to put on my zen cloak and ignore this cacophony of sounds and scents, which accompany the blaring music and flying sweat.

In yoga classes, some poses are meant to relieve your body of trapped gases or "wind", so it's normal for a bit of air to pass out.

To minimise the release of these gases during exercise, one needs to drink the right fluids and eat the right foods in the right amounts, and time it accordingly.

I'm not a proponent of exercising on an empty stomach because my body lacks the *oomph* to power through an intensive workout, or even a hike for that matter.

I need adequate fuel to keep this old train chugging so that I have energy to maximise my workout, increase my ability to burn calories and build muscles.

For most people, the perfect time for a pre-workout snack or meal is one or two hours before training.

How much you consume depends on your metabolism, how hard you want to work and the duration of the exercise.

The right foods

Healthy foods that are ideal for weight loss and muscle building may not necessarily be suitable as a pre-workout meal and can leave you feeling weak.

By Assoc Prof Dr CHIN YIT SIEW and Dr ZAWIAH HASHIM

NON-COMMUNICABLE diseases (NCDs) and their risk factors, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, have been rising and affecting large segments of the population.

NCDs are mainly a result of our unhealthy lifestyle, especially our poor eating habits. In fact, our diet can significantly affect our health, either positively or negatively.

As parents, you have a huge influence over your family's eating habits.

It is important to teach and expose your children to healthy eating from early childhood, so they will continue to practise it as they grow up.

This is the only way to prevent NCDs in your family.

Most people usually start with a new year's resolution to eat healthily or go on a diet and strive for radical changes, hoping for immediate results.

Healthy eating does not mean that you need to have a total diet overhaul or shun your family's favourite foods.

All you need to focus on are small, positive changes in your family's daily routine and choice of foods, and make them something attainable and sustainable.

With consistent effort, everyone will reap the long-term benefits of healthy eating (and active living).

Below are some suggestions to kick-start small changes in your family's eating habit.

Breakfast

This is the first meal that begins

Pre-workout fuel-ups

Foods that are ideal for good health may be detrimental just before a workout.

When you exercise, your muscles require a lot of blood to be pumped into them; hence the blood flow to your stomach is limited. A full tummy will require energy to digest food, which then drains the power from the rest of your body.

To maintain the highest level of energy during your workout, concentrate on carbohydrates and protein, while limiting fat.

These three macronutrients are metabolised differently, so they're all absorbed by the body at a different pace.

Carbohydrates provide the quickest energy: simple and sugary carbs are absorbed the fastest, while healthy complex carbs, like those found in whole grains or legumes, take longer.

Protein is absorbed the second-quickest, and fat takes the longest to digest.

Most foods have a combination of these different macronutrients, so the digestion time depends on the ratio.

Examples of good choices to fuel up before a workout include eggs, yoghurt, sweet potato, yam, cottage cheese, a slice of toast and peanut butter, fresh fruits or a fruit/yoghurt smoothie.

If you're like me and constantly rushing from one place to another with few minutes to spare before



Trail mixes are not ideal pre-workout snacks as some of their ingredients, like nuts, are slow to digest and won't be utilised during your workout.

you hit the gym or trail, eat a piece of fruit such as an apple or banana.

The key is to consume carbohydrates that are easily digested so that you don't feel sluggish.

Bananas are easily digested and are a good source of natural sugars, simple carbohydrates and potassium.

The natural sugars and simple carbs are broken down quickly, boosting your glycogen stores and increasing blood sugar levels.

Bananas are also a good source of magnesium, which helps with muscle cramping, calms stress levels and promotes sleep.

In the past, I opted for protein or

granola bars for snacks, but I'm much more informed now, so I've changed my views.

According to 8fit, the Berlin-based health and wellness company that has more than 25 million users worldwide, protein bars tend to be heavily processed and high in sugar or artificial ingredients.

They say, "Energy bars or trail mixes aren't an ideal pre-workout snack either, even if they only contain natural ingredients like nuts."

"Remember, high-fat foods like nuts are slow to digest, so your body can't use them as fuel immediately."

"An energy bar might even leave

you feeling less energised during your workout: your energy is needed for digestion if you eat one too soon beforehand."

Foods to avoid?

Go easy on warm fluids (which tend to speed food through your intestines), as well as milk and high-fat or high-fibre foods.

Strict no-nos are salads, legumes, nuts, cruciferous veggies (broccoli, bok choy, cabbage, cauliflower etc), leafy greens, legumes and grains.

These are all hard to digest and can upset your stomach, releasing unwanted gas in the process of exercise.

Coffee lovers, rejoice! Some experts say there is nothing wrong with drinking a cup of coffee prior to exercise as caffeine can enhance athletic performance.

I've tried drinking tea 30 minutes prior to exercise and it does no harm if my workout is a cardiovascular one.

The same can't be said for yoga or core exercises. The fluid gurgling in my stomach is pretty uncomfortable and leaves me nauseated.

Whatever you choose, don't gorge yourself thinking you're going to burn it off shortly. It doesn't work.

The less time you have, the lighter your food should be. You need just enough fuel to ride through the workout. You can load up on your favourites later.

Revathi Murugappan is a certified fitness trainer who tries to battle gravity and continues to dance to express herself artistically and nourish her soul.

One meal at a time



Never let yourself or your children skip breakfast as it is necessary to provide your body with enough energy to kick-start the day. — Filepic

your day, so do not skip it.

Breakfast provides the body with sufficient energy to keep you and your child energised to start the day.

However, a study by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia in 2015 found that one in four school children skipped breakfast at least thrice a week.

Breakfast skippers are 1.3 times more likely to become overweight or obese.

If you are a busy parent, you can prepare your family's breakfast in advance.

For example, mix pancake batter at night and cook the next morning.

Healthy ready-to-eat breakfast foods, such as wholegrain cereal, oat drinks, bread with healthy spreads, fruits or milk, are also more convenient.

Lunch

Most people eat out for lunch as they go to work or classes.

However, eateries tend to have diverse options, tempting us to make unhealthy choices.

Eating out is quite unavoidable for many people; but we must choose wisely.

Choose healthier dishes and watch out for portion sizes (refer to healthier eating-out tips below).

Alternatively, prepare a healthy home-cooked lunch for you to bring to the office, and for your child to bring to school or nursery.

Snacking

Snacks are food we have between main meals, but children should try to avoid snacking close to main mealtimes.

Watch out for high-calorie snacks and remember not to overeat.

During morning or afternoon breaks, avoid *kuih*, cookies or chips that are high in sugar, salt or fat.

You can indulge in your favourite snacks, like cakes and ice-cream occasionally.

However, do choose smaller portions and those with lower calories, without cream/filling/icing.

Dinner

This is the best time to eat together with your family and flaunt your cooking skills.

Cook at home as often as you can for total control over the ingredients and methods of cooking.

To reduce usage of salt, opt for natural herbs and condiments, like garlic, onion, lemon grass or lemon, as flavour enhancers.

Have a hearty meal by adding different-coloured vegetables into your soup dishes.

For convenience, use recipes where all ingredients are put in one pot and cooked slowly. Use dried herbs, pastes or stocks to save time.

You can also cook a large batch on weekends, store in the freezer, and reheat for dinner on weekdays.

Another alternative is to cook one simple vegetable dish and buy the ready-cooked meat or protein dish.

Eating out

Sometimes we cannot avoid eating out or ordering take-away meals due to our busy schedules.

In that case, opt for dishes prepared with healthier cooking methods, e.g. boiled, baked, grilled or steamed. Ask for more vegetables,

and less sugar, salt and oil. Be cautious of high-fat foods such as cream- or *santan*-based dishes.

If the portion is big, share the meal to avoid overeating and wasting.

Drink water

Keep your family and yourself hydrated by drinking at least six to eight glasses of plain water a day.

Reduce intake of sugar-sweetened beverages as these are high-calorie beverages. And when drinking coffee, tea or a chocolate beverage, opt for less or no sugar.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Start now with these small steps and build these healthy eating habits into your family's life.

This approach will make changes to dietary habits possible and more sustainable.

Healthy eating habits, in addition to an active lifestyle with regular physical activities, will be rewarding for the whole family in the long term.

All this may sound very simple, but it is indeed that simple. However, you need to be consistent in making these changes.

Make time to change today!

Assoc Prof Dr Chin Yit Siew and Dr Zawiah Hashim are with the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO). This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia 2019, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly organised by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia, the Malaysian Dietitians' Association and MASO. NMM will be organising a Food-Fit-Fun Fair at IOI City Mall, Putrajaya, on April 17-21.