

# Come on folks, think of your health

**ALARMING:** Health and fitness awareness among Malaysians is low, causing a spike in obesity and non-communicable diseases, writes Elvina Fernandez

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Malaysians have been advised to eat more vegetables and fruits to avoid obesity and non-communicable diseases which are on the rise.

## 13 health tips

INFOGRAPHIC: NST

- increase vegetable and fruit intake
- reduce salt, sugar, oil and coconut milk in cooking
- use appropriate cooking method (steam instead of frying)
- avoid adding salt or sugar to precooked food
- avoid high calorie food
- walk more
- take the stairs instead of lifts
- drink more water
- do not skip meals
- reduce stress level
- increase outdoor activities
- get enough sleep
- perform medical check-ups to identify illnesses and keep non-communicable diseases under control



## Did you know?

- sweet potato lowers blood pressure
- peppermint tea's high menthol content relieves headaches and all sorts of ailments

**H**EALTH awareness among Malaysians is still low and experts hope that New Year health resolutions would not die down as the days go by.

Malaysian Dietitian Association president Indra Balaratnam said people often made drastic health plans which were often difficult to follow causing a failure to their plans to have a healthier year.

"It is advisable not to make major changes in eating or exercise strategies, but start small and slowly increase the pace," she told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

She said an individual should identify the area of concentration first before making small, but achievable changes.

"For example, if one is identified as a diabetes patient, he or she should reduce the intake of food and drinks which are high in sugar."

Indra said the individual should also read about the disease, get a glucometer, monitor and control the sugar level and meet a dietitian or doctor to understand an appropriate lifestyle to suit the disease.

"It is important to set a time frame when adapting to a new eat-

ing habit and lifestyle. It could be say, three months and then increase the momentum during the following three months."

She added that other changes that could be made was switching to wholemeal bread, avoiding sugary drinks and food, reducing sugar in cooking and drinks as well as reducing banana intake.

"If previously you could eat four bananas at one sitting, cut the intake down to one this year."

The public was also urged to log on to the association's website at [www.dietitians.org.my](http://www.dietitians.org.my) for more dietary and nutrition related matters.

Malaysian Council for Obesity Prevention president Jong Koi Chong blamed unhealthy eating habits of Malaysians for the high obesity prevalence and spike in non-communicable diseases (NCD).

In 1996 only 4.4 per cent of Malaysians were obese, but in 2011, the figure shot up to over 15 per cent with a body mass index of more than 30.

"The country still needs to work hard towards healthier citizens as the prevalence of obesity is high."

He added it was important to fight obesity among Malaysians as

it contributed to the rising number of NCDs, such as diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and even mental health.

"The public, particularly the younger generation, needs to quickly adopt a healthier lifestyle to prevent Malaysia becoming a nation of sick people."

Statistics showed that 32.7 per cent of the population suffered high blood pressure in 2011 compared with 32.2 per cent in 2006, while mental health among children aged between 5 and 9 years rose to 19.1 per cent from 12.3 per cent in 1996 and among teenagers aged 15 and 16, the figure increased to 22.2 per cent from 13.4 per cent.

In 2006, 21.5 per cent of adults and 18.2 per cent of teenagers aged between 13 and 15 were smoking and exposed themselves to chronic diseases such as heart attack, cancer, lung diseases and stroke.

A study also found that only 7.5 per cent of Malaysians in 2006 took five servings of vegetables and fruits daily as recommended by the World Health Organisation, but physical activities rose from 56.3 per cent in 2006 to 64.8 per cent last year.

Jong said the public should make room for more outdoor activities and make exercise a habit throughout their lives.

"They should watch what they eat, as Malaysian food is undeniably delicious, but uncontrolled consumption can be fatal"

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**"The country still needs to work hard towards healthier citizens as the prevalence of obesity is very high."**

**Jong Koi Chong**  
*The Malaysian Council for Obesity Prevention president*

- **hazelnuts** are high in vitamin E, B and folate
- **pomegranate** can prevent or alleviate heart disease, some cancers and Alzheimer's
- **almonds** may decrease the level of bad cholesterol
- **cucumber** juice can lower blood sugar
- **bananas** reduce depression
- **ginger** may prevent colon cancer and treat ovarian cancer
- **cashew nuts** help prevent bone-related problems
- **wasabi** can kill cancer cells
- **pineapples** help digest food and build strong bones
- **grapes** can reduce blood clots
- drinking **lemon** juice can cure bad breath
- pectin in **apples** can lower bad cholesterol by 16 per cent
- **avocados**, high in vitamin A and C, help burn fat

headache and allows good sleep

- **green tea** boosts immunity against illness
- **maize** can prevent diabetes and hypertension
- **potatoes** are beneficial in curing stomach ulcers
- **eggplants** have a high fibre content which can prevent constipation
- **asparagus** helps with treating HIV
- **spinach** is an anti-aging vegetable
- a **carrot** a day reduces stroke risk by 68 per cent
- **lettuce** is beneficial in the treatment of insomnia
- consume boiled cloves of **garlic** for treating asthma

