

Obesity on the rise

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BAD DIET: Culture of eating any time of the day detrimental to health

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THE number of Malaysian adults suffering from obesity is growing, with more than one-third having high blood pressure and high cholesterol, while one in 20 is afflicted by diabetes.

Heart disease remains the No. 1 cause of death for the past four decades while lung, breast and colon cancer are among the five top killers.

If Malaysians continue with their current eating habits, the statistics might become scarier in the next few years.

These are some of the salient points highlighted in a book authored by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM) president Dr Tee E. Siong entitled *Malaysian Diet* —

The Plain Truth.

“Malaysians love their food and eating has become a pastime that shapes the very fabric of our society.

“Social meet-ups revolve around food and more often than not, entire conversations are based on where to find the best nasi lemak, teh tarik or *kuih*,” he said.

The culture of eating has nurtured an increasingly overweight and unhealthy society.

“What people misunderstand is that there is no such thing as bad food or good food, only bad or good diets.

“It is possible to enjoy food, especially delicious Malaysian cuisine, but it should be done in moderation so that it does not adversely affect our health.”

Dr Tee said Malaysians were fortunate to live in a country where a variety of food is available round-the-clock, but “it is the culture of overeating at any time of the day that is detrimental to our health.”

“Our incessant habit of eating is no longer about how hungry we are but the fact that food is readily available any time we feel like indulging.



More than one-third of obese Malaysians have **high blood pressure and high cholesterol**, while **one in 20 has diabetes**.

“Many of us have deskbound jobs and machines have taken over, the manual labour in our lives, therefore, the calories we consume don’t get burned up.”

He said he was inspired to write the book after noticing that Malaysians were lacking in terms of control and discipline when it came to their diets.

Malaysians’ eating habits combined with a sedentary lifestyle were the main factors that had contributed to the growing number of diseases, such as diabetes and cancers.

Dr Tee said while these diseases commonly plagued developed countries, Malaysia was quickly catching up with this trend as the

country became more affluent and urbanised.

He said it was a common misconception that to stay healthy one has to give up the joys of eating, when in fact, the variety of local dishes, fresh produce and ingredients were mostly nutritious.

The best way to obtain nutrition to maintain good health is to eat them in the right proportion and balance.

“There is a need for Malaysians to learn to make wiser choices, meaning if you had a heavy breakfast, maybe for lunch you can consider a lighter meal or practising better control and moderation in terms of what you choose to eat,” said Dr Tee.

His book also listed calorie contents for Malaysian favourites, such as chicken rice, *pisang goreng*, rojak and *char kway teow*.

“The book is not about fad diets or what foods to avoid or how to go on a diet.

“It is more on providing basic information on food and nutrients based on the dishes that Malaysians love to consume.

“At the same time, it will guide people to make appropriate food choices.”

Dr Tee is formerly the head of the Medical Research Institute’s Cardiovascular, Diabetes and Nutrition Research Centre. He has been the NSM president for the past 19 years.