

Eating in 2007

What's in store in the nutrition scene for 2007.



**Nutri
Scene**
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WE are still in the first month of the new year. On the nutrition scene, several nutrition activities and programmes have been planned for the year. I would like to share with you some of the main ones.

This instalment is not meant to provide comprehensive information on each topic presented, nor is it meant to serve as a comprehensive listing of all projects coming up. What I would really like to do is to provide some information for nutritionists and related health professionals and highlight several programmes that the general public should be aware of.

I do urge you to take note and participate in these activities. You need to be involved; you need to contribute to make these activities and programmes successful.

National Plan of Action for Nutrition II (2006-2015)

Community nutrition intervention programmes have existed in the country since the 1960s. Throughout the years, different government agencies have carried out programmes to improve the nutritional status of the population.

The first effort to coordinate programmes in nutrition intervention in the country amongst various agencies began in the early 1990s, under the purview of the National Coordinating Committee on Food and Nutrition (NCCFN). These efforts culminated in the documentation of the National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN) of Malaysia (1996-2000).



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This Plan describes in detail the strategies of various government agencies, academia, professional bodies and industry to combat nutritional disorders. Activities were identified to tackle both under- and over-nutrition problems.

With developments in the country in recent years, it was deemed necessary that the Plan be reviewed. Hence, the NCCFN released the revised NPAN for 2006-2015 (termed NPAN II) last year.

The entire review process was rather thorough, with efforts put in to obtain input from various government agencies, academia, non-government organisations, professional bodies and the private sector. Current and emerging issues in nutrition were taken into consideration in the revision to ensure that the Plan is relevant and appropriate.

The general objective of NPANM II is to achieve and maintain optimal nutritional well-being of Malaysians.

Two specific objectives have been identified, namely to:

- Enhance the nutritional status of the population
- Prevent and control diet-related non-communicable diseases.

To ensure effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan, various strategies have been identified. Two relevant strategies that I would like to highlight here are:

- Strategies in promoting healthy eating and active living for all
- Ensuring all have access to nutrition information

Indeed, I have been harping on these topics since the commencement of the *NutriScene* series. It is vital that the Plan be implemented with the guiding principle of close collaboration within a multi-sectoral framework. I do hope that the Plan will be given the widest publicity, so that the relevant stakeholders can participate effectively.

If you are a nutritionist or related professional, you must find out more about this Plan and become involved. This write-up is only a brief regarding the Plan; I hope to discuss this topic again in a separate article in this column.

Annual Scientific Conference of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia

The largest nutrition science meeting in the country is coming up in the first quarter of the year, scheduled for March 29-30. This will be the 22nd in the series organised by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia.

Nutritionists, dietitians and allied professionals look out for this event as participants gather to learn of developments in nutrition science, to exchange experiences and views, renew friendships and make new ones.

The theme of this year's conference is *Current Concerns in Adolescent Nutrition*. Adolescence is the transitional stage of human development in which a juvenile matures into an adult. This transition involves biological (ie pubertal), social, and psychological changes, though the biological ones are the easiest to measure objectively.



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During these changes, adolescents are faced with various challenges, including nutrition-related health issues. Tackling the nutrition issues faced by adolescents should be of concern to all nutritionists.

We have invited a senior official of the Health Ministry to present a keynote address on health issues affecting adolescents as well as government policies and programmes for this target group. Focused symposia on this theme have been planned to highlight the main nutrition issues affecting adolescents. Invited speakers will cover topics such as obesity and related health problems, anaemia, eating habits, body image and eating disorders and sports nutrition.

Other topics in nutrition shall also be discussed in the Conference. This is an opportunity for nutritionists to share their research findings with their colleagues. A special symposium that will provide updates on fats and oils in human nutrition shall be organised. As in previous years, poster sessions will also be organised to enable more researchers to share their findings with other participants of the Conference.

There will be a full scientific programme; educational and exciting. I urge all nutritionists, dietitians and related professionals to make it a point to attend this conference. We really need to continuously update ourselves. There are so few opportunities for attending scientific meetings in this country, and even less for nutrition science. Do not miss this great opportunity. Obtain more information from www.nutriweb.org.my.

Nutrition Month Malaysia 2007

You may recall that Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) commenced in 2002. The programme is aimed at further promoting healthy eating amongst the community.

NMM is jointly organised by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM), the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO) and the Malaysian Dietitian's Association (MDA) and supported by the Health Ministry.

A number of activities are carried out throughout the month to increase public awareness, including a series of healthy eating articles featured in newspapers, several nutrition road shows, radio and TV talk shows, exhibitions and forums.

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Whilst these are carried out by the Steering Committee, the state health departments have been encouraged to carry out parallel activities at the local level. The State Nutrition Officers are provided with key information to enable them to conduct some of these activities.

Tackling adolescent concerns is not a task only for nutritionists. It is the responsibility of all. Hence, for 2007, it has been proposed that this subject be adopted as the theme for Nutrition Month Malaysia.

The Steering Committee for NMM plans to organise a number of activities to highlight this topic. The challenge would be to find ways to reach out to adolescents effectively.

The approach to be taken would therefore also include secondary targets, for example, parents and school authorities (headmasters, teachers, etc). These may be the intermediaries or the change agents. I do hope that NMM will help to increase awareness of the nutritional needs of adolescents, the importance of meeting such needs, as well as the nutritional and health problems faced by adolescents.

Most importantly, the messages will emphasise that it is vital to look after the nutritional well-being of adolescents, now.

Other nutrition activities

There are numerous activities that have been planned but I am not able to elaborate at this time. There is a project spearheaded by the Health Ministry to provide nutrition information to schoolchildren to guide them in food choices in canteens.

This is a topic close to my heart as I have spoken about this some 30 years ago. This is a topic parents and teachers have spoken about for a long time. The school environment, including the school canteen, must certainly

be one of the channels we can utilise to promote healthy eating.

A project to provide food and nutrition information to shoppers in supermarkets has been planned for some time. This is another potentially useful approach as consumers can obtain accurate information on food values of raw foodstuffs as well as information on labels of processed foods.

The Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM) is committed to participate in an exhibition scheduled for the end of August. General nutrition information as well as guidelines for specific groups shall be made available to visitors. Do check out the NSM website (www.nutriweb.org.my) for more details closer to the date.

The series of road shows that NSM conducted in previous years have been hugely popular.

They served to increase public awareness and provided information on healthy eating. NSM has not been able to do more of these in the past year due to the lack of financial resources.

This write-up has highlighted only a few of the nutrition activities and programmes going on this year. I hope government agencies and other professional organisations that have nutrition activities and programmes will highlight these widely to the relevant target groups.

I do hope we will make further progress with improving nutrition of Malaysians in 2007.



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■ **NutriScene** is a fortnightly column by Dr Tee E Siong, who pens his thoughts as a nutritionist with over 30 years of experience in the research and public health arena. For further information, e-mail starhealth@thestar.com.my.

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