

MALAYSIANS are busier than ever today. Most of us face hectic schedules and juggle multiple responsibilities, leaving us little time to eat, or eat right.

We now eat out more often and eating and drinking on the go is common. We prefer convenience or instant meals and also depend heavily on take-away services. There is growing reliance on maids to plan and prepare meals in many families.

There is also a mind-boggling choice of foods and a deluge of health and nutrition (misinformation) to deal with. Exercise takes a backseat. Our stress levels are high and maintaining the work-life balance is a challenge.

Does this describe your lifestyle? Or close to it? Read on and take a peek on how Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2008 can help you eat right and enjoy an active life in a contemporary lifestyle.

As Chairperson of the Steering Committee (SC) for NMM 2008, I would like to give you a look at the activities on offer. I would like to excite you to watch out for these activities.

Nutrition Month Malaysia promotes awareness of healthy eating

Many years of health education campaigns by the government and professional bodies have successfully created a respectable level of awareness among the public about the importance of good nutrition.

However, we should not be satisfied with such successes. Diet-related chronic diseases are still prevalent at an alarming level and remain a huge challenge; there is still insufficient understanding of the role of nutrition in the causation and prevention of nutritional disorders.

Stemming from the realisation that there is indeed a need for continuous efforts to provide more unbiased nutrition information to the public, Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) was initiated in 2002 and inaugurated on April 13, 2002. Henceforth, NMM has been observed in the month of April in the country for the past six years.

The NMM project is a collaborative effort between fellow professional bodies, namely the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM), Malaysian Dietitians' Association (MDA), and the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO).

The project also has the support of the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH), particularly the Family Health Development Division.

The objective of NMM is to promote greater awareness and the practice of healthy eating, in line with the Government's healthy lifestyle programme.

During NMM, a number of activities are to be carried out, using a variety of approaches, to further raise the visibility of nutrition. It is envisaged that a burst of activities throughout the country during NMM will be able to further raise public awareness on the importance of healthy eating in maintaining health and well-



Eat right,

Nutrition Month Malaysia 2008 (NMM 2008) focuses on a healthy contemporary lifestyle.



The central objective of NMM 2008 is to promote healthy diet and nutrition as central to general wellbeing. - Reuters photo

being.

Different themes are selected for each NMM. The topics given focus over the years are:

- 2002: Building healthy families
- 2003: Healthy eating, healthy life
- 2004: Eat right, work well
- 2005: Youth & nutrition: future of the nation
- 2006: Women & nutrition
- 2007: Adolescents & nutrition

Nutrition Month Malaysia 2008

NMM 2008 is adopting a broad approach. It is recognised that the awareness of consumers towards basic nutrition is generally good.

The Steering Committee (SC) for NMM therefore decided to focus the educational materials towards contemporary lifestyle, fast-paced and hectic, as I had outlined in the opening paragraphs of this write-up. We want to emphasise to the public that healthy eating is absolutely essential and indeed possible with hectic schedules and a challenging work-life balance.

The central objective of NMM 2008 is thus to promote healthy diet and nutrition as central to general wellbeing.

Activities are aimed at providing useful information and practical advice in the context of contemporary lifestyle and dietary trends. Educational messages will also attempt to address prevailing public misperceptions.

NMM press supplement

A special supplement on *Eat Right, Enjoy Life* was published in *The Star* on April 11.

The supplement has useful tips and interesting information on healthy eating and increased physical activity that aim at helping you feel better, look better and enjoy life.

There are three main sections in the supplement. The section on *Get Zesty* provides practical nutritional tips on how to manage your meals through a hectic day. Tips are provided for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Insight into healthful snacks (if you need them) and reminders to take enough fluid are also provided. The key message is that you must and can eat healthily in spite of tight daily routines.

The second section, *Body Care*, emphasises that through adopting a combination of healthy eating and regular physical activity, you will be able to lose the excess body weight gained over the years and maintain an ideal body weight. You will need a plan that will help you build new habits. Having a plan makes it easier to be disciplined and keep tabs on your progress.

The write-up provides practical tips for making a body care plan that will include plans for healthy eating as well as plans to get active.

The third section focuses on *Looking Good and Healthy*. For these purposes, we emphasise that what you put into your body may be more important than what you put on it (e.g. creams and lotions).

After all, eating healthily benefits the skin, hair, nails, teeth and even eyes, while protecting your internal organs from harm and damage.

Conversely, poor nutritional intake (and lack of physical activity) can lead to problems, from unsightly skin conditions to full-blown disease. Eating the right foods will provide you with essential nutrients and other healthful components, the path to good looks and good health.

The write-up provides tips on looking out for foods rich in phytochemicals, vitamins and essential fatty acids.

Press article contributions

Besides the supplement that you may pull out and keep for future reference, several other articles shall be published in other newspapers and magazines from late April till end of May. We intend to continue to highlight the key messages of NMM 2008 through other media for wider exposure.

Tentative topics of these press articles are:

Healthy eating for Malaysians of today
Eating right to a great day

Too busy to eat?

Eating & stress

Eating & staying active

Staying healthy to prevent diseases

You will have noticed from the titles of the articles that the focus shall be the same as that for the press supplements. Do look out for announcements on these publications in www.nutriweb.org.my.

NMM Official Guide and Recipe book

This official guidebook is the "hero" of NMM 2008. It is the main publication of NMM 2008, a small booklet of about 40 pages aimed at providing useful and practical tips on healthy eating and active living.

The emphasis in the guidebook will be same as that of the press supplements. There will be much more information in the guide, providing more details on meeting the needs of busy Malaysians, to help them cope with meeting nutritional needs when always on the go.

The emphasis is on having a healthful breakfast at home and practical tips are provided on fixing a nutritious meal and enjoying it. If you have to leave home early to beat traffic and do not have to eat at home, tips are provided for a healthful meal at the office, coffee shop or gerai mamak nearby.

No matter how busy you are, you must find time to grab a bite for lunch as your body needs to replenish its nutrients at midday. Practical tips are provided on balanced and varied meals for packed lunch or at eateries near the office.

The guide emphasises on attempting to have dinner at home as it gives you the opportunity to prepare proper meals to meet your daily nutritional needs. Tips on preparing meals at home are provided as well as ideas for eating out, when doing so.

Modern living can be stressful and stressed-out individuals react in different ways. Some people turn to food for comfort. A separate chapter deals with managing stress effectively. The guide emphasises that one should not turn to food to relieve stress, but instead learn of other ways that may help. Several stress-busters are provided in the guide.

Another chapter is devoted to helping you lead an active lifestyle. Physical activity leaves you looking good. It also increases your self-confidence, gives you a sense of power and boosts your self-esteem and energy levels.

Therefore, make time to exercise at least 30 minutes daily on most days of the week. If you're busy with work or other commitments you can still be physically active. The guide provides tips on how to sneak in some exercises in your daily routine. Remember: every little bit

enjoy life!



Health Minister Datuk Liow Tiong Lai (second from right) at the launch of Nutrition Month Malaysia 2008 on April 12, 2008. With him are Malaysian Dieticians' Association Vice President Shanaz F.H. Mawji (far left), Nutrition Society of Malaysia's president Dr Tee E Siong (second from left) and Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity President Prof Dr Mohd Ismail Noor (far right).

counts.

The chapter on *Eat Healthy, Prevent Disease* emphasises the importance of a healthy lifestyle to reduce risk to diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension.

These risk factors begin to develop from a very young age. Hence, eat right and adopt healthy lifestyle habits from today; indeed it should start from childhood.

The chapter provides interesting notes on foods that contain healthful effects beyond just providing nutrients. These include vegetables and fruits; wholegrain cereals and cereal prod-

ucts; and beans, pea and lentils.

You will also be reminded that food may contain substances that may be harmful to health, including carcinogens and contaminants.

Have you always thought that "santan contains cholesterol"? Have you been told that "eating red meat causes cancer"? Or that "carbohydrates are fattening and should be avoided"? If so, you must read this chapter called *But I Always Thought ...*. There is a listing of a dozen common myths about food and nutrition. We will explain to you the facts.

Do you know that you can make a better



A chapter in the NMM Official Guide and Recipe book is dedicated to helping you understand the nutrition information panel (NIP) and to make effective use of the nutrient information provided. - AFP photo

selection of food according to your needs by just reading the nutrition label stated on your food packaging? A chapter in the guide is dedicated to helping you understand the nutrition information panel (NIP) and to make effective use of the nutrient information provided.

You will also be given quick notes on nutrient content claims, function claims and disease-related claims.

Last, but certainly not the least important, learn the *Basics of Healthy Eating*. The guide explains the Malaysian dietary guidelines in simple terms, in a more interesting format. Do

not belittle these eight basics; always be guided by these principles.

Isn't the guide just what you need to help you get along? Get a copy for yourself.

Make use of the opportunities made available

I am sure I have whetted your appetite to know more about NMM 2008. I am sure you will look out for the various educational materials that will be published. I am certain you will want to get hold of them and keep them for reference.

Participate in the activities that will be rolled out. Such activities are not just in the federal capital. State Health Departments shall also be conducting similar activities. Do look out for these.

Finally, a gentle reminder that healthy eating is not just for Nutrition Month. Healthy eating is for all, at all times. It need not be expensive or difficult; it does require discipline and determination.

If you miss the supplement or the educational articles, or if you wish to obtain more information on NMM 2008 activities, visit the Nutrition Society of Malaysia website: www.nutriweb.org.my.

■ *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. The information provided is for educational and communication purposes only and it should not be construed as personal medical advice. The Star does not give any warranty on accuracy, completeness, functionality, usefulness or other assurances as to the content appearing in this column. The Star disclaims all responsibility for any losses, damage to property or personal injury suffered directly or indirectly from reliance on such information.