

Enjoy eating right for life!

Healthy eating is certainly possible in our contemporary lifestyles.

NUTRITION Month Malaysia (NMM) 2008 was launched in April with the theme *Eat Right, Enjoy Life!* NMM 2008 is focused on providing useful information and practical advice in the context of a contemporary lifestyle, which is fast-paced and hectic.

It emphasises to the public that healthy eating is absolutely essential and indeed possible with hectic schedules and a challenging work-life balance. Educational messages also attempted to address prevailing public misperceptions.

To further strengthen the key messages of NMM to the public, a series of six articles were subsequently published in the local press. These were authored by local nutritionists and dietitians and aimed to provide further tips to the public on healthy eating and active living through other media for wider exposure.

I would like to share with readers excerpts from three of these articles.

Holistic approach to wellness

A healthy diet is central to general wellbeing. Eating healthy, however, is just a component of achieving complete wellness and vitality.

For overall nutritional wellbeing, we should not only eat well, but also pay attention to physical activity, our socio-emotional wellbeing and disease prevention. These are the four pillars that comprise a holistic approach to nutritional wellbeing.

A healthy diet

A healthy, balanced diet provides you the daily nutrients and other food components that enable you to have a healthy mind and body to perform your daily activities. It is wise to eat a variety of food as no single food supplies all the required nutrients. Different foods in the same group (e.g. rice, bread and cereals) provide different nutrients in varying amounts.

Eat a well-balanced diet based on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods and cut down on your intake of fats, sugar and salt.

Fitter, happier!

Being physically active is equally as important as eating healthily. Physical activity improves cardiovascular fitness, strength and flexibility, burns up calories to keep you fit and trim and leaves you looking, feeling and thinking better.

Manage mental stress

It's true that modern living can wreck havoc with stress levels, but eating right places you in a better position to handle stress and manage life. It also boosts self-esteem, confidence and makes you feel good.

Don't try to relieve your stress by bingeing on food or drink. Instead, try other approaches, such as taking things easy, learning to manage



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time or doing more of the things you enjoy.

Prevent disease

Heart disease, cancer and diabetes are increasingly prevalent today. In spite, and because of these chronic diseases, you should practice healthy eating habits. Coupled with a healthy lifestyle, good nutrition will help you stay well and delay, or even maybe prevent, medical complications.

Make it a point to go for regular medical check-ups that can detect and treat early cases of heart disease and diabetes. Test your blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure levels frequently to ensure they're kept within the recommended ranges.

If you adopt these four pillars of wellness and vitality, it's a good bet that you will continue to enjoy life today, tomorrow and for a long, long time to come!

Busy, but eating healthy

On some days, you may find yourself so caught up with work and personal commitments that you hardly have time to catch your breath. And because you're trying to accomplish as much as possible, eating takes a backseat. Your breakfast is a cup of coffee or a *teh tarik*. You skip lunch due to your hectic schedule and your dinner companion, sad to say, is a packet of potato chips hastily wolfed down in the office.

If you find yourself frequently facing such days, where it's all go, go, go, it's safe to say that you've been disregarding healthy eating habits. But fear not. Simply follow these simple-to-adopt tips that tell you how to find the time to eat and what to consume to obtain the appropriate nutrients and energy to ensure you stay sharp and focused when your days are full.

Boost your day with breakfast

Breakfast not only kick-starts your day and provides you enough fuel to keep going, this all-important meal has also been scientifically proven to improve your attention span, alertness and memory function.

To boost your metabolism, eat a balanced diet comprising complex carbohydrate foods like wholegrain cereals and high-protein foods like milk and cheese. Cut down on foods that are high in fat like *roti canai* and *nasi lemak* on most days. Such foods may make you feel bloated and lethargic.

Recharge and re-energise with lunch

By lunch time, your body would have used up most of its nutrients and energy from breakfast. Lunch thus provides you the opportunity to re-fuel and increase your alertness and performance. Follow these ideas and you'll feel recharged and more than ready to face the second part of the day!

Avoid eating while working, as you tend to eat more than you need. Try to take proper lunch breaks as much as possible.

Always go for healthy, light dishes and don't overeat; stop when you're full or you'll end up bloated and sleepy.

If you eat out and order mixed rice or noodles, remember to add fish or lean meat and vegetables to make your meal complete and balanced. Top it up with a piece of fruit for dessert.

If you're eating in the office and there's an only instant noodle, try to find some veggies or eggs to add. For a healthy edge, have a fruit or a glass of 100% pure fruit juice or soy/dairy milk. For a calcium boost, add cheese to your sandwich or buns.

Wind down with a home-cooked dinner

After a hectic day, it's great to come home and have a proper sit-down dinner because this meal gives you the chance to meet your daily nutritional requirements.

But what do you do if it's one of those days when you still have your hands full? You can opt to eat out or *ta-pau*, but if you prefer a healthier home-cooked dinner, here are ways to get just what you want:

Keep cooked rice or pasta as a healthy base for a quick meal. As long as you have the right ingredients, just throw them in to create your own recipe!

Clean and keep vegetables so they're all ready to cook. Or if time is really of the essence, you can also eat certain veggies like carrots or celery raw.

Cut up and freeze fish, poultry and meat in individual packets. You can defrost these by moving them from the freezer to the refrigerator before leaving for work.

Get meals home-delivered. It saves cooking time and is a great help if you're completely useless in the kitchen! Cater from someone you're familiar and comfortable with and don't be afraid to insist that your food is freshly prepared.

Food for kids on the go

Your kids need proper nutrition. These are formative years for them, so the right foods are critical for the typical growth changes that will occur. They include height and weight gain; bone, muscle and teeth growth; and brain, nervous system and psychological development.

Good nutrition, thus, helps your kids grow and develop, stay healthy and achieve their full potential, whether it's during fun time or study period.



Research has shown that breakfast improves your attention span, alertness and memory function.

Getting your children to eat right, however, begins with you. You need to make the effort to find out good feeding practices i.e. what and how much to provide your young ones.

Making nutritious choices

Whether its breakfast, lunch, dinner or snacks, nutritious food choices play a big role in keeping your children up and about and full of energy. It's also important that your kids don't skip meals as each meal provides them with proper nutrients and energy.

Try these daily meal ideas to ensure your children get a variety of foods and all the nourishment and *oomph* they require to behave like the kids they are!

Breakfast boosters

Breakfast not only fills up stomachs and fuels kids up for the first part of the day, it also makes them more alert and improves their memory so they'll pay more attention in class. Try:

- Breakfast cereals with milk
- Baked beans, omelette and toast
- Chicken/fish porridge with veggies

Lunchy munchy!

Lunch replenishes nutrients and energy used up from breakfast and re-fuels tiny bodies and minds so they're better prepared to face the second half of the day. Try:

- Rice with vegetables served with chicken/fish/beef cooked in light soy sauce or steamed *tofu* with minced meat
- Noodles in soup with lean chicken and vegetables
- Steamed chicken rice with salad

Dinner delights

Dinner time gives your children the chance to wrap up their daily quota of nutrients. Encourage sitting down and eating together as nothing allows for better family interaction than dinner time. Try:

- Spaghetti/macaroni with chicken, vegetables and cheese in tomato sauce
- Home-made chicken burgers with wholemeal bun and veggies

In-between snacks

Snacks keep growling stomachs quiet between meals. Serving beverages such as milk, malt drink, fruit juices and soya bean milk together with tidbits helps improve the nutritional value of the snack and adds a yummy boost! Healthy choices include:

Small pack or single serving box of cereal

Semi-sweet biscuits or crackers
Buns or bread with cheese

It's important to keep your children's mealtimes as pleasant, relaxed and comfortable as possible so that they enjoy eating. Make food appealing by changing the presentation, maintain a healthy atmosphere and encourage your child to eat.

Always remember that a healthy childhood is the foundation of a healthy adult life, and proper nutrition is the key to building a strong base!

■ If you have not obtained the NMM Guide book or missed 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. Information published in this article is not intended to replace, supplant or augment a consultation with a health professional regarding the reader's own medical care. 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.