

Practical nutrition tips for a hectic lifestyle.



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NUTRITION Month Malaysia (NMM) 2008 was launched in April with the theme *Eat Right, Enjoy Life!* I have summarised the main NMM educational materials in a previous write up of *NutriScene* (April 20).

In a further write up on NMM 2008, I had summarised the contents of three educational articles that were published to further strengthen the key messages of NMM.

In this instalment, I would like to share with readers excerpts from the three remaining articles. I certainly hope they will provide you with further tips on healthy eating and active living.

There's more to some foods than meets the eye

Nutrition experts are always exhorting you to eat more fruits, vegetables, rice and other cereal products and legumes. This is not merely to ensure that you get your daily dose of vitamins, minerals as well as the all-crucial dietary fibre. Indeed, there are another reasons that may just surprise you!

Something else to chew on

Foods like oranges, cabbage and oats, like all other food, do indeed provide you different nutrients and vitamins. But these everyday foods, however, do more than just that. They also contain numerous naturally occurring components, which are thought to provide physiological and health benefits that go beyond just your basic nutrients.

These components are known as functional components, and foods containing them are called functional foods. In recent years, much attention has been generated on the potential health significance of these components and how they can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and coronary heart diseases.

Fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables contain a good amount of bioactive components called phytochemicals, which are compounds found in plants. Carotenoids are good examples of these phytochemicals. These are found in the orange-red pigments of fruits and vegetables.

Some carotenoids include lycopene (in papayas and tomatoes), lutein (in green leafy vegetables), and beta-carotene (many green leafy vegetables).

Other healthful phytochemicals in fruits and veggies are glucosinates (eg cabbage, cauliflower, *kai lan*, *pak choy*) and flavones (veggies such as celery, bell pepper and lettuce).

Beans, legumes and soy beans

You may have been consuming soy beans by drinking soy milk, eating tofu, *tempeh*, *taufu-fah*, *fu-chok*, and other beans such as red and green beans in your *bubur* as part of your daily diet.

But do you know beans and legumes are not only good sources of protein and dietary fibre, but are

Eat this

also rich in healthful phytochemicals?

Some bioactive components identified in the humble soy bean are isoflavones and phytosterols, which have been demonstrated to be able to lower blood cholesterol level.

Tea

Tea contains important bioactive components that comprise a group of polyphenol compounds called flavanoids, which have been linked to lower risks of coronary heart disease and certain cancers.

Yoghurt and cultured milk

Yoghurt, yoghurt drink and cultured milk have been associated as "healthy" beverages because they contain probiotics (added by manufacturers) – friendly and healthy living bacteria that maintain the balance of your body's intestinal flora and facilitate digestion. They can also contribute to the gut's resistance to "hostile takeovers" by harmful bacteria. The two "friendliest" probiotics are lactobacilli and bifidobacteria.

Don't let your emotions eat you up

There's no doubt that eating habits are sometimes influenced by mood. For instance, you may eat or drink too much during a happy occasion.

On the other hand, you may end up eating or drinking too much when nothing seems right. This could be related to work stress, family or personal problems, or simply because nasty weather has prevented you from going shopping!

Overindulging once in a while is normal. However, things become less healthy when occasional bouts of overeating become habitual.

Disappointment makes me eat

You may dislike having excess flab and decide to lose weight. So you begin to starve yourself, which in the long run is self-defeating and biologically impossible to sustain.

You then eat (perhaps more than you should), but feel guilty for doing so. You may also feel disappointed for having violated your diet regime.

Instead of picking yourself up, you spiral downwards into an all out binge that lasts longer than your attempt to lose weight. You then gain weight and feel bad about your physical condition, which triggers another vicious dieting cycle.

When this pattern becomes a long-term habit, you may end up with a higher risk of becoming overweight or obese.

Eating under pressure

Long-term or chronic stress can also affect your regular eating habits. There may be times when you're so stressed because of work or personal responsibilities that you turn to food or drink for comfort.

During these times, you also tend to increase your consumption of alcohol, become less active and feel decreasing levels of self-control and self-esteem.

Any attention you may have been paying to what you eat and all other concerns about food and diet go out the window during times of chronic stress. Instead of control-

ling your food, it controls you.

Beating the bingeing blues

If you are in the habit of overeating, the first thing you need to accomplish is to develop an awareness of your eating behaviour.

Remember, there are so many other enjoyable things that you can do when you're feeling happy, sad or stressed instead of just eating and drinking!

Shift your focus from food to other feel-good activities. For instance, try exercising (which tones your body and also increases your self-confidence and self esteem), meditating, spending more time with family and friends, going on vacations or taking breaks from work.

Eat right and get moving to keep moving!

You have a busy lifestyle, one that keeps you on your toes most days, dividing your time between work and personal commitments.

On some days, however, you find yourself out of steam, tired and listless. You barely have enough energy to crawl out of bed.

What's going on? You're eating, but why the lack of oomph? The food you consume everyday should provide you sufficient energy to keep you on the go, shouldn't it? Is there something missing?

Eating right is part of it

You may be eating regular meals, but maintaining a busy pace of life day in and day out requires more than just eating on time. You also need to practise healthy eating habits, as the proper nutrition provides you the essential nutrients and other food components that enable you to maintain your hectic pace of life.

When it comes to eating right, it's crucial to eat a variety of food because different foods provide diverse combinations of energy and nutrients. To ensure you get your daily requirements, eat a varied diet that combines cereals, legumes, fruits and veggies, meat, fish, poultry and dairy products (with an emphasis on the first four types of foods). You also need to cut down on your intake of fats, sugar and salt. And drink lots of water!

Get moving!

Staying active is equally as important as eating healthy to maintain an overall sense of well-being. In fact, proper nutrition and physical activity go hand in hand. This is because the right diet provides you the energy you need to stay active.

Among the numerous advantages of physical activity is that it allows you to sustain your energy balance i.e. it burns excess calories to keep you fit and trim, not overweight or obese. It also helps you maintain a healthy body weight and improves your cardiovascular fitness, strength and flexibility.

Exercise also appears to be especially effective when it comes to boosting your health in various disease-specific areas, including cardiovascular diseases (it helps strengthen heart muscles), hypertension (reducing high blood pressure), diabetes (regulate your blood glucose level), obesity, and osteoporosis.



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If possible, you should try to exercise at least 30 minutes daily on most days of the week. If you're on the heavy side, don't go all out and start with a 20-minute jog once you begin your exercise routine! Instead, try some light stretching and maybe a 5-10 minute walk.

Once you see the pounds coming off, you can slowly ease into a more vigorous workout programme.

Too busy?

You may find it hard to slot in some time for physical activity. But if you're really serious about your health, you can always find ways to sneak in some exercise into your daily routine. Here's how you can stay active.

- Break your exercise sessions into 10-minute bursts, three times a day, say, in the mornings, afternoons or late evenings.
- Do desk exercises (eg stretching, twisting or bending) and walk to your colleague's workstation at the office whenever possible.
- If you need to get somewhere close by, walk instead of driving.
- If you do drive, park further away from your destination and use your legs to get you there!
- Use the stairs and skip the elevator and escalator.
- For every hour you watch TV or read, take a 10-minute exercise break.
- Don't spend your time inside. Get out more and enjoy the great outdoors!

- Wash your car yourself. You'll save money and get a good workout!

So you see, if you adhere to a combination of eating right and obtaining a regular dose of physical activity, you'll not only look great and glow with health, but you'll also have more than enough energy to work, think, play and continue to enjoy the busy lifestyle you've become accustomed to each and every day!

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.