



## Nutri Scene

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# The year that was

## Nutrition activities last year included programmes for promoting healthy eating and scientific updates.

In this issue, I would like to share with readers the main developments in nutrition activities throughout 2010. The activities included dietary guidelines and activities for the community as well as scientific events for nutrition and healthcare professionals.

Of particular significance was, of course, the silver jubilee celebrations of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia in March.

### Malaysian dietary guidelines revised

Dietary guidelines (DG) have become an almost universally accepted tool in nutrition education, promoting appropriate dietary patterns. The first set of official food-based dietary guidelines for Malaysians was published in 1999. Ten years later, these guidelines were thoroughly reviewed and revised.

The new Malaysian Dietary Guidelines (MDG) was launched on March 25, 2009, in conjunction with the 25th Scientific Conference of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia.

The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines 2010 is a compilation of the latest science-based nutrition and physical activity recommendations prepared by a group of key nutrition scientists in the country. The MDG is primarily meant for healthcare professionals, especially nutritionists, dietitians, medical doctors, and nursing staff. It aims to provide advice on how to promote healthy eating and also practise an active lifestyle (visit [www.moh.gov.my](http://www.moh.gov.my) for the book).

The MDG has 14 key messages. These messages cover a range of food and nutrition issues, from the importance of consuming a variety of foods, to messages for guidance on specific food groups. The revised guidelines also include specific messages to encourage physical activity, consuming safe food and beverages, and making effective use of nutrition information on food labels.

The MDG also has an updated food pyramid.

It is of utmost importance that the MDG is widely disseminated to the public. The public must be empowered with the correct messages contained in these guidelines.

All stakeholders must then ensure that these messages are communicated effectively to the public. The published MDG must first be distributed to all relevant stakeholders and professionals. From the book, messages must be disseminated to the public using a variety of approaches.

For this purpose, the Nutrition Society of Malaysia has published a series of leaflets based on the 14 messages ([www.nutriweb.org.my](http://www.nutriweb.org.my)).

It is indeed the responsibility of healthcare professionals to ensure that consumers have access to this information. The food industry can do its part in helping to disseminate these messages widely through their own network. It can also contribute by making healthier choices of foods available to the public.

### Nutrition Month Malaysia 2010

Initiated in 2002, Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) has been observed in the month of April for the past eight years. The objective of NMM is to promote greater awareness and the practice of healthy eating and active living, in line with the Government's healthy lifestyle programme.

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



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port of the Health Ministry, particularly the Nutrition Division.

For the year 2010, the Education Ministry also collaborated in this programme.

Recognising that there is significant undernutrition and overnutrition problems amongst children, NMM has given attention to improving the nutritional status of Malaysian children. In 2009, focus was given to children below six years of age. In 2010, NMM's focus on children moved on to the next phase, which is primary school-aged children (ages seven to 12 years). This is an important phase of children's life to start inculcating healthy eating habits from young, which will provide a strong foundation as they grow into adulthood.

With the theme "Healthy Children, Healthier Nation – Start Young", NMM intends to empower parents to raise healthy, active children. NMM focuses on bringing about greater awareness of the importance of optimum nutrition, physical activity, and hygiene in children to all parents and caretakers, thus equipping them with basic knowledge about child nutrition and practical guides.

NMM 2010 conducted various activities targeting both parents and primary school children. The "heroes" of NMM 2010 were two publications, namely *Smart Nutrition for Your Growing, Active Kids*, which is a guidebook for parents, and *Kembara Alam Sam*, a comic and activity booklet for children.

The main highlight was a series of fun educational school roadshows called Nutrifun, which was conducted in 65 schools in the Klang Valley. Through these road shows, NMM provided simple yet fun, basic healthy eating messages to primary school children. In the *Buku Skrap Sihatku* contest, hundreds of children submitted scrap books that described their daily meals and activities for one week.

For parents and the general public, the highlight was a family carnival titled "Healthy Children, Healthier Nation – Start Young".

### Healthy kids programme

Healthy children are the foundation for a future generation of healthy Malaysians. In cognizance of this, the NSM launched the Healthy Kids Programme (HKP) in early August. The programme is aimed at improving nutrition knowledge and promoting healthy lifestyles among school-going children in Malaysia.

With the theme "Let's Be Healthy!", HKP comprises a two-pronged programme that will run concurrently. The first component is a number of awareness promotion activities

among primary school children and parents. The second component is the development and evaluation of the effectiveness of an educational programme to improve knowledge, attitude, and practices on nutrition and physical activity. Efforts were also made to promote active lifestyles among these children. The HKP will be continued into 2011.

An important educational tool for the HKP is the creation of a dedicated website, [www.healthykids.org.my](http://www.healthykids.org.my). This educational website offers useful tips, animated articles, as well as interactive games and tools for both children and parents.

### NSM celebrates its 25th anniversary

A significant milestone of the NSM was the celebration of its silver jubilee last year. Commemorative activities were launched in conjunction with the 25th Scientific Conference of the NSM. A silver jubilee souvenir book and a video tracing the formation, growth, and activities of NSM over the years were launched.

Since its establishment in 1985, NSM has contributed significantly in defining the understanding and practices of nutrition in this country. Although limited in its resources, NSM has persevered to make a difference.

From its modest beginnings, the society has now come to be highly regarded as the principal professional body in nutrition. By promoting academic enquiry and scientific exchange, NSM has spurred the growth of local nutrition research while facilitating the sharing of global knowledge.

In the realm of public education, NSM has continually reached out to young and old alike, with valuable guidance to discover the benefits of good nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. The society has actively contributed in policy development and supported the implementation of action plans in consonance with the Government's vision to shape a healthier nation.

For 25 years, the NSM has not only witnessed the transformation of our nation, it has also been instrumental in helping to shape a nutrition-conscious public. They have been challenging years, but the society persevered in its passion to promote good nutrition. NSM can and should be encouraged by the knowledge that, day by day, more people are becoming more concerned about their nutritional wellbeing.

### Updates in nutrition science

There were several scientific nutrition meetings held in the country last year. The

main event was the 25th Scientific Conference of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia. The NSM annual scientific conference has been THE nutrition meeting for the country for the past 24 years. This is the event that nutritionists and dietitians look forward to every year as it provides an excellent platform for them to meet new friends and previous acquaintances, be updated on nutrition science, and share experiences and views.

Recognising the importance of promoting healthy eating amongst children, "Healthy Children, Healthier Nation – Start Young" was chosen as the theme of the Conference. There were five symposia sessions, with a total of 23 oral presentations, many of which were related to child nutrition.

A regular feature was a symposium to enable members of NSM to share their research findings on a variety of issues on nutrition and health. The Young Investigator's symposium enabled budding nutritionists to experience making a presentation before their peers. More than 150 scientific posters touched on a wide variety of research topics.

The NSM also organised a scientific update session for its members in July. The session focused on maternal obesity, weight gain in pregnancy, and birth weight.

The International Life Sciences Institutes (ILSI) – South-East Asia (SEA) region – organised two scientific meetings in Kuala Lumpur. The first was a seminar and workshop in September to provide updates on international and regional regulatory developments in the area of nutrition labelling and health claims. The meeting, the sixth in the series to be organised by ILSI since 2001, was attended by officers from regulatory agencies in South-East Asian countries and scientists from Australia, United Kingdom, Europe, and the US. Two more recent and controversial issues related to nutrition labelling, namely front-of-pack labeling and nutrient profiling, were also discussed.

The second scientific meeting held in Kuala Lumpur by ILSI (SEA Region) was a Symposium on Nutrition and Cognition. The meeting was held in mid-October and was co-organised by the NSM. The symposium examined how nutrition may play a crucial role not only in the physiological development of the brain before birth, but also the development of cognitive functions, mental performance, and behaviour throughout life.

The potential for nutritional intervention to influence cognitive development and function was discussed. The need to establish evidence-based benefits of nutrients and food components for optimising cognitive functions that can be substantiated through appropriate assessments tools was emphasised.

Another two important scientific meetings in the region that I highlighted in this column last year were the 6th Shirota Conference and the 19th Symposium on intestinal flora held in Tokyo in October. Scientific evidence for the potential role of probiotics in various physiological functions, health, and medical conditions were discussed in these scientific meetings.

■ *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](mailto: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.*