

Raising healthy eaters



AS caring parents, you want to give the best to your children. You shower them with love and attention. You want to make sure they are well clothed and have all the material needs. As caring parents, you should also look into their nutritional needs.

You should nourish your children from young. There is only a small window of opportunity open to you during the formative years to start feeding your child right. Nutrient needs are high during this time of rapid growth and development, and habits are formed during the early years; do not wait until your children have developed unhealthy eating habits.

So, caring parents, read on and see how Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2011 can help you provide proper nourishment to your children. Empower yourself and be better equipped to raise healthy eaters.

NMM promotes healthy eating and active living

Initiated in 2002, Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) has been observed in the month of April for the past nine 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 support of the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH), particularly the Nutrition Division.

For the past few years, the Education Ministry has also been collaborating in this programme.

Annually, a number of activities have been carried out during NMM, using a variety of approaches and media, to disseminate messages on healthy eating and active living. Activities include publishing educational materials such as guidebooks and educational articles, seminars and workshops, and roadshows and exhibitions at community level. Nutritionists of the State Health Departments carry out similar activities throughout the country.

Since 2008, more NMM activities have been carried out. These have been made possible with the support of various corporate sponsors. This enables more educational activities to be carried out, benefitting more members of the public.

Starting young

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

It is a call for all stakeholders (the government, industry, professional organisations, consumer bodies and the public) to collaborate in promoting healthier Malaysian children.

The nutritional needs of children are high. Their daily energy and nutrient needs increase with age to support their growth, development, and daily activities.

There are no short-cuts to enable children to meet these nutrient needs. There is no "super food" to help your child grow healthy and smart overnight.

At the same time, there is no need to particularly fear and avoid any single one food or

Nutrition Month Malaysia 2011 helps caring mums provide proper nourishment for their children.



The official launch of Nutrition Month Malaysia 2011 (NMM 2011) is scheduled for April 23-24, in Mid Valley Exhibition Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

nutrient. For instance, there is no need to avoid eggs just because these contain high amounts of cholesterol. There is no need to totally avoid fat or sugar just because excessive intake can lead to unwanted weight gain.

A child must obtain his energy nutrient needs by consuming adequate amounts of a variety of foods. A balanced approach, eating foods in moderate amounts, guided by the Malaysian dietary guidelines, is the best approach to raising healthy eaters.

To help parents grapple with these issues, NMM has prepared a number of educational materials to provide parents with appropriate nutrition knowledge on raising healthy eaters. Great efforts have been taken to ensure that the information provided is unbiased and factually correct. All efforts have been made to aim to provide practical guidance and tips, relevant to current scenarios.

You'll discover that with the right guidance and information, healthy food preparation and good nutrition need not be daunting. Make the effort and you will find that feeding young children can even be fun!

Guidebooks for caring parents

Two booklets, *Raising Healthy Eaters* (RHE) and *Easy Nutrition Planner* (ENP) aim to help parents promoting healthy eating amongst young children, aged one to six years.

RHE provides parents with simple basic knowledge about child nutrition; meal planning and shopping; healthy cooking; healthy eating guides, including the child food pyramid; common nutritional problems; and weight monitoring.

ENP focuses on providing practical guides and tips on healthy eating, cooking methods, meal planning, shopping, food storage, an FAQ section, and also several recipes.

For parents of children of primary-school age, a separate guide book has been prepared. *Smart Nutrition for Your Growing Child* is an informative publication that aims to empower parents by providing them with simple basic knowledge about nutrition, meal planning, and healthy cooking.

In an effort to provide parents with practical tips on healthier meal preparations, NMM has published yet another booklet, *Wholesome Meals, Practical Recipes for Your Growing Child*. It aims to empower parents by providing basic nutrition knowledge, meal planning

tips, healthy cooking principles, as well as 23 healthy recipes suitable for preschool and primary school children.

The recipes are divided into food groups and analysed for their nutrient content. NMM hopes that this book will encourage parents to serve their children healthier home-cooked meals.

Materials for kindergarten teachers

Based on information in RHE, a DVD that can be used by kindergarten teachers to teach toddlers healthy eating has been produced. Messages in the DVD are short and tailored to the level of young children.

To further make learning these messages fun for the kids, worksheets for colouring, and simple quizzes, have been prepared.

A training seminar on the use of the RHE, the DVD, and the worksheet is being planned for May, where kindergarten teachers from various parts of the country can participate. Such a train-the-trainer session aims to equip the teachers with appropriate knowledge to pass on simple healthy eating messages to young children under their charge.

Comic books and more for children

Educational materials have also been prepared for use by primary school children. These include a comic book called *Kembara Alam Sam*, and an activity booklet. These materials have been developed to spark children's interest to learn the basics of healthy eating and healthy living through fun, interesting stories.

Another workbook, *Ceria dengan Gaya Hidup Sihat*, is targeted at upper primary school children.

This workbook serves to provide basics of healthy eating and living principles through short comic strips, followed by activity sections, as well as diary sections to encourage children to start practising what they have learnt.

NutriFun roadshows in schools and kindergartens

In addition to these print educational campaigns, various outreach activities targeting both children and parents have also been planned.

One of these activities is a series of fun and educational school road shows called

Nutrifun, which will be conducted in various primary schools in the Klang Valley. Through these road shows, NMM hopes to impart simple, yet fun, basic, healthy eating messages to the primary school children.

Messages will be conveyed directly to students through a "story-telling session". It is also through these roadshows that the educational materials, such as the comic and activity booklet mentioned above, will be distributed.

To further reinforce the importance of healthy eating amongst primary school children, NMM will also carry out a contest, entitled, *Buku Skrap Sihatku*. The children will be required to describe their daily meals and activities for one week in this scrap book. This can be through notes, drawings or picture cuttings.

In this contest, the schools will be looped in to encourage their respective students to participate.

Another outreach activity is a series of fun activities in kindergartens. These Kindy NutriFun roadshows will provide simple educational messages on food groups and fun Q&A sessions.

It is our belief that healthy eating messages must be disseminated to children from a very young age.

Fun and learning in NMM 2011 Family Carnival

Another major outreach activity is the NMM 2011 Family Carnival, scheduled for April 23-24, in Mid Valley Exhibition Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

This will also be the official launch of NMM 2011, and a variety of activities planned include family and child nutrition screening, a toddler talent content, games, quizzes, and trade exhibition by sponsors of NMM 2011.

Educational materials of NMM and the Nutrition Society of Malaysia shall be distributed during the event.

For the children, the main attractions in the family carnival will be the NutriActive Corner, where they will be able to play educational games such as the Food Pyramid, preparing healthy breakfast, as well as kid's performances and quizzes.

The family and child nutrition screening will include measurements such as body mass index, blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol levels. Individual food and nutrition advice will be given by nutritionists and dietitians.

No fees are required for participating in any of these activities, whilst visitors can expect giveaways/samplings by the sponsors of NMM 2010.

Parents will also receive free copies of the educational materials mentioned above.

Devote effort and time to the health of your children today. Find time to invest in ensuring the nutritional needs of your children are met. Find time to be with your children, to know your children.

■ *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.