

“Healthy Children, Healthier Nation – Start Young” Nutrition Month Malaysia 2010

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Initiated in 2002, Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) has been observed in the month of April for the past 8 years. The objective of NMM is to promote greater awareness and the practice of healthy eating, 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 year 2010, the Ministry of Education is also collaborating in this programme.

During NMM, a number of activities have been carried out, using a variety of approaches and media, to further raise the visibility of nutrition. Different themes have been selected for each NMM. The topics given focus over the years were:

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
2008: Eat Right, Enjoy Life
2009: Healthy Children, Healthier Nation

Available data from various studies have highlighted the underweight and overweight problems affecting children in Malaysia, as well as iron deficiency anaemia, vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency disorder as among the most important micronutrient deficiencies. The National Plan for Nutrition of Malaysia (NPANM II 2006-2015) has therefore given due focus to improving the nutritional status of children in the country.

In cognizance of the importance of improving the nutritional status of Malaysian children, NMM will for the second consecutive year, focus on children but now moving on to the next phase which is the primary school aged children (ages 7 – 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 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 and practical guides. It is a call for all stakeholders (government, industry, professional organisations, consumer bodies and the public) to collaborate in promoting healthier Malaysian children.

In celebrating NMM 2010, we will be conducting various activities targeting both parents and primary school children. The “hero” of NMM 2010 shall be the two publications, namely *Smart Nutrition for Your Growing, Active Kids* which is a guide book for parents and *Kembara Alam Sam*, a comic & activity booklet for children.

The *Smart Nutrition* guide book is an informative publication that aims to empower parents by providing them with simple basic knowledge about nutrition; meal planning; healthy cooking as well as healthy eating guides including the child food pyramid. This book also aims to help parents inculcate healthy eating habits in children as well as imparting nutrition knowledge in them; which eventually will stand them in good stead as they grow into adulthood.

Educating children on healthy eating has always been a challenge. As such, the comic & activity booklet *Kembara Alam Sam* is developed to spark children’s interest to learn the basics of healthy eating and healthy living through fun, interesting stories. The book also has sections on simple activities to reinforce the key messages and thus making learning fun. This would go a long way towards promoting optimal nutrition and inculcating healthy eating habits and physical activity into our younger generation.

Apart from these two publications, there will be a number of educational press articles to reach out to all parents throughout the country. The first 4 articles have been scheduled for publication from mid April till first week of May. All these write ups, to be published in an English, Malay and Chinese national newspaper, are focused on various aspects of nutrition for primary school children, including tips on empowering primary school children on healthy eating. The second series of press articles is targeted for publication throughout the month of May till early July; tackling issues on appropriate snacking habits, making meals fun, healthy living, healthy digestive system and probiotics.

In addition to these print educational campaigns, various out-reach activities targeting both the children and parents have also been planned. The main highlight is the series of fun-educational school road shows called *Nutrifun* which will be conducted in 65 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 ‘fun story-telling session.’ It is also through these road shows that the educational materials, such as the comic & activity booklet, educational classroom posters and a book mark will be distributed.

To further reinforce the importance of healthy eating amongst primary school children, NMM will also carry out an inter-school contest titled, “*Buku Skrap Sihatku*”. This contest aims to encourage children to express their learnings from the “NutriFun” school road show into a scrap book. In this contest, the schools will be looped in to encourage their respective students to participate.

For the parents and the masses at large, the highlight will be a family carnival titled “*Healthy Children, Healthier Nation – Start Young*”, scheduled on May 15-16 in Mid Valley Exhibition Centre. This two-day event will have a wide range of fun-filled and educational activities for all members of the family; such as family and child nutrition screening, children’s performances, interactive games/activities at *NutriActive* Corner and giveaways/samplings by the sponsors of NMM 2010.

Throughout all these years, NMM is able to successfully conduct all these activities targeted at the masses only because of the generosity from several caring corporate citizens in the country. The Steering Committee of NMM gratefully acknowledges their generous support.

Particularly for the year 2010, we truly appreciate the collaboration of the Ministry of Education to enable us to reach out to the primary targets of our project, the primary school children.

There is a need to continue to empower Malaysians with healthy eating knowledge. There is a need for continuous efforts to provide more unbiased nutrition information to the public. There is therefore a need for Nutrition Month Malaysia to continue; and grow and reach out to all corners of the country, all segments of the population.

It is certainly not sufficient just to have a few booklets published and a dozen articles in the press and magazines. We need to disseminate these information to the people. We need the help of all of you at the community level to assist in this. We need you as a nutritionist, a dietitian, a food scientist, a doctor, a health professional, an academician, and even you as a member of the community to help promote the messages of NMM, to promote healthy eating.

I am of the belief that there are people who benefit from these activities. I urge you to do your bit in promoting NMM 2010.

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