

Positive Parenting

PP13746/06/2013 (032586)

**Cut the Sugar,
Reduce Health Risk**

**Understanding
Pregnancy Stretch Marks**

**Looking into your
Child's Eye Health**

Reading with your Toddler

**Breakfast
Energises
your Day**



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Chairman, Positive Parenting Management Committee and Consultant Paediatrician & Paediatric Cardiologist



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“Parental awareness
and education
is vital in raising
healthy children.”



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Nutrition Society of Malaysia
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“Healthy eating habits
and good food choices
must be cultivated
from young.”



**Professor Dr Norimah
A Karim**
Honorary Secretary, Nutrition Society of
Malaysia and Nutritionist



Professor Dr Poh Bee Koon
Nutritionist



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“Mental health is
a key component in
every child's total
health and well-being.”



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central to raising
children with values
and principles.”



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“If a child cannot learn in
the way we teach, we
must teach in a way the
child can learn.”



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“Early childhood care
and development helps
children grow and
discover their potential.”



P.H. Wong
President, PPBM



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<http://mmha.org.my/>

“Mental health and
resilience starts with
the family.”



Dato' Dr Andrew Mohanraj
Consultant Psychiatrist



Malaysian Association of Kindergartens
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“A quality preschool
education prepares
children for formal
schooling and lifelong
learning.”

Starting the Day Right with Breakfast

As parents, we naturally want the best for our children. Good health is just one of the things every parent wishes for their children, and when combined with the possibility of better academic performance, it is a no-brainer. Unfortunately, with today's busy and hectic lifestyle, more and more people are taking shortcuts in their bid to get things done quickly. One such 'casualty' is breakfast – far too many are skipping this important meal.

It is with this thought that we remind you of the importance of breakfast, especially for a growing child. We also highlight the obstacles that may lead to skipping breakfast and how you can overcome them. We hope that by instilling the habit of eating breakfast in your child at a young age, this habit will follow him into his adult life.

We have also included some words of wisdom from trusted professionals that highlight many topics such as a step-by-step guide to safely introducing potentially allergenic complementary foods to baby, learn about the very real problem of lazy eye syndrome that can affect children, understand the functions of probiotics and its importance to digestive health, learn fun ways to teach your child about healthy eating, and how to empower teens to better handle cyber bullying.

In closing, we hope you will have great success as a parent. It is our greatest hope that your child will not only grow but also prosper in a safe and healthy environment. It is our fervent hope that you will find this issue of use in your parenting efforts and we do hope that you will enjoy reading this issue. All our previous articles and issues can be accessed from our website at www.mypositiveparenting.org.



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contents



13



25



33

Feature

- 5 Breakfast Energises Your Day

Nutrition & Healthy Living

- 11 Cut the Sugar, Reduce Health Risk
13 Inspire Your Kids to Eat Healthy!
15 Eating Fresh Safely
17 Don't Miss Out on Milk's Benefits
20 Healthy Cooking & Fun with Your Kids
22 How Diet Affects Our Gut Health

Family Wellness

- 25 Understanding Pregnancy Stretch Marks
28 When Your Spouse has a Mental Illness

Child Health

- 31 Looking into Your Child's Eye Health
33 Are You A 'Flu'-ent Parent?

- 36 Safe Ways to Introduce Highly Allergenic Foods

- 39 Know Your Probiotics

Child Development

- 43 Reading with Your Toddler

My Positive Teen

- 45 Building A Firewall Against Cyberbullying



43

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Breakfast Energises Your Day

Breakfast is basically the first meal of the day. It is also the first meal that you will be providing your body with after an eight-hour (or longer) fast since your last meal before you went to bed. It is the most important meal of the day as it helps get the body ready for the rest of the day.

Benefits of breakfast

Eating breakfast makes it more likely that school-going children will have better concentration, attention and more energy.

In recent reviews of breakfast consumption among students, it was found that eating breakfast could reduce absence from classes thus improving attendance rates.

In terms of health, children who regularly take breakfast tend to have better overall health, especially if they are provided with a healthy breakfast. It is a great opportunity to provide your child with nutrients that he may not be getting enough of throughout the day. It also ensures that they get more vitamins and minerals than what they can get from just lunch and dinner. For example, a simple breakfast of cereals with milk gives your child:

- **Fibre**, which promotes bowel movement and also reduces the risk of obesity as it makes him feel full and eat less.
- **Milk**, which is rich in many nutrients important for a growing child.

Continue on next page...



Easier to skip – but not wise

Too often, mornings are a rushed affair with you rushing to get ready for work while at the same time, making sure that your child gets ready as well. This often leaves you with little or no time to prepare breakfast. However, the important thing is to make every effort to ensure that both you and your family eat breakfast.

Breakfast is not something that should be ignored, yet the findings of a locally conducted study show some troubling facts – 1 in 4 Malaysian schoolchildren skip breakfast at least three times a week, and breakfast skippers were 1.34 times more like to become overweight or obese. Not all adults regularly consume breakfast either, as indicated in another survey which found that 1 in 10 adults skipped breakfast.

If you fall into this category, don't despair! Just continue reading to learn more about what you can do to overcome this problem.

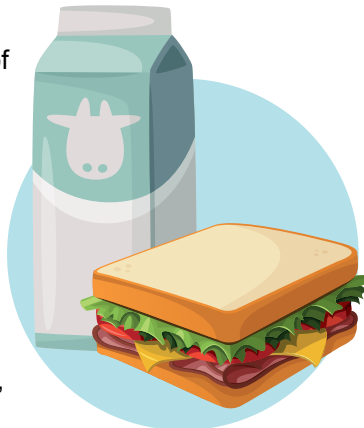
Beating the excuses for skipping breakfast

Listed below are some common excuses for skipping breakfast and tips on how you can overcome them:

■ I only have minutes to get ready! –or– I don't have time to cook in the morning

A few minutes are enough to have a bowl of whole grain cereals with milk and fruit chunks. You can prepare it the night before – place the bowls and spoons on the table, cut the fruits and store in the fridge. In the morning, just pour the cereal into the bowl, mix in the fruits and milk, and it's ready to eat!

Alternatively, you can just prepare your breakfast the night before and just reheat the next morning



■ Can't stop for breakfast –or– I have an urgent meeting! –or– I have to leave for work early!

Grab something that you can eat on-the-go such as single-serve foods/drinks, e.g. high-fibre crackers and a box of UHT malted drink/milk. Alternatively, you can always grab some fruits instead such as

an apple, banana, or pear. You could also prepare a simple sandwich the night before (e.g. wholemeal bread with tuna spread).

■ It's too early for breakfast –or– I'm not hungry yet

You don't have to eat breakfast within the hour after waking up, just make sure you do eat something to fuel your body for the hectic day ahead. Just eat a slice of wholemeal bread and a glass of malt drink/milk to start and a healthy mid-morning snack later if you're hungry. Alternatively, you can drink your breakfast instead! Try a healthy smoothie by blending yoghurt and banana with milk and some ice.

■ I'm on a diet so I'm skipping breakfast

Eating breakfast actually helps with weight loss or weight control as it helps prevent food cravings and overeating during the day. You can always opt for a low-fat breakfast consisting of a hardboiled egg and wholemeal bread plus some fruit (e.g. slice of papaya or an apple).

Remember that you have to prioritise breakfast in your home! Even if it is not possible for the whole family to eat breakfast together, you should still prepare something for your child. If there's not enough time for him to eat at home, you can always prepare some ready-to-go breakfast foods instead. Healthy options include ready-to-drink milk/yogurt, cereal, breakfast bars and fresh fruit.



Possible ill effects of skipping breakfast

While eating breakfast has plenty of benefits, what could possibly go wrong if you skip it habitually? Well, there are several problems that breakfast skippers may have to contend with, namely:

- a possible negative impact on your child's academic performance, e.g. poor attention in school, higher absenteeism rate.
- greater tendency to snacking on high calorie foods, may lead to excessive weight gain. **PP**

Breakfast Energises Your Day

Building the Breakfast Habit

Now that you have heard all about the importance of eating breakfast, let's look at how you incorporate it into your daily lifestyle.

After all, eating breakfast regularly gives so many benefits that there is really no reason why you should skip it at all! However, you should also bear in mind that in order to get the most out of breakfast, you must ensure that your choice of breakfast is a healthy one.

What's healthy for breakfast?

Breakfast is an excellent time to get some stock up on fibre, which can come from fruits or whole grains such as oats, whole grain cereals, or wholemeal bread. A quick and simple breakfast can be as simple as a glass of milk and a bowl of oats with banana or you could cook some scrambled eggs to go with some whole grain toast.

Here are some simple strategies to help you overcome any possible barriers that stand in the way of a healthy breakfast.



Prof Norimah A Karim
Nutritionist & Honorary
Secretary of Nutrition
Society of Malaysia

- **Get in the habit** – for habitual breakfast-skippers, you should include breakfast as part of your morning routine. You can do this gradually, e.g. breakfast on two consecutive mornings, then three mornings, etc. The final goal is to eat breakfast on a daily basis. To get started, you can begin with fruits, e.g. a banana, an apple or a slice of papaya, or a pack of yoghurt or milk. Grab one before you leave and make sure that your child does the same. Be sure to gradually include other food groups.
- **Prepare the night before** – it helps to prepare things the night before if you have very little time in the morning, e.g. place bowls and spoons for oats/whole grain cereals on the dining table, slice some fruit, make hard-boiled eggs, or have your smoothie blender and the ingredients all set up.
- **Leftovers for breakfast** – don't stick only to 'traditional' breakfast foods. You can actually make extra portions for dinner and reheat it the next day for breakfast. This method is also a great time-saver for the mornings as you can just pop the food in the microwave for a quick reheat and you're ready to go.
- **Take stock** - check your breakfast supplies often and replenish when necessary. This helps ensure that you will have sufficient quantities of your breakfast favourites on hand and avoids situations where you are left holding an empty cereal box in the morning or opening the fridge to find no yoghurt left.

Other useful tips:

Regardless of how busy you are in the mornings, you can successfully make time for breakfast every day. Here are some tips to get you started:

Less than

1
min

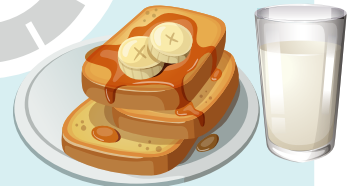
- ▶ **Grab'n'go** – grab a banana, apple, pear, and/or a pack of yoghurt/milk or even small packets of oat biscuits and high fibre biscuits
- ▶ **Drink your breakfast** – choose from chocolate malted drink, milk or flavoured milk, or make a smoothie (you can use a regular blender or a personal blender which doubles as a drink container)



Up to

5
min

- ▶ Wholemeal bread with peanut butter (optional – add banana slices)
- ▶ Wholemeal bread with cheese/tuna
- ▶ Instant oatmeal, milk (optional – add apple chunks or slices, or use raisins)
- ▶ 1 cup plain yoghurt with slices of fruit (optional – add nuts/seed)
- ▶ A bowl of wholegrain cereals with milk (optional – add dried or sliced fresh fruits)



Up to

10
min

- ▶ Toasted wholemeal bread with butter/kaya (optional – use sandwich filling instead. It can be prepared the night before or you can use tuna spread)
- ▶ Scrambled eggs (optional – add some diced capsicum or tomatoes, prepared the night before)
- ▶ Half boiled eggs and a glass of malted drink
- ▶ Omelette in a mug – in a microwave-safe mug, place the contents of an egg (optional – add capsicum, mushroom, etc.), stir in some cheese or milk, and microwave for 3 minutes



Up to

15
min

- ▶ Toasted wholemeal bread with poached/fried eggs and tomatoes
- ▶ Grab-and-go omelette – mix your ingredients (e.g. eggs, diced capsicum/tomatoes, etc.) in a ziplock bag, then place it in a pot of boiling water for 10 minutes.
- ▶ Easy egg and spinach wrap – ingredients are wholemeal wrap, egg, spinach, and cheese. Just whisk everything in a bowl, scramble the egg mixture and spoon it into the wholemeal wrap. Fold and enjoy!



Don't limit yourself to only these suggestions, there are many other wonderful breakfast concoctions that are both healthy and delicious that you could enjoy. The important thing is to get into the habit of eating breakfast instead of skipping it. **PP**

Breakfast Energises Your Day

Breakfast is for Everyone



As a parent, wanting your child to develop healthy habits such as eating breakfast is completely natural. However, this is one healthy habit that you should follow as well. Remember that parenting by example is far more effective as your child is much more likely to follow your advice if he sees you doing it.

If you typically skip breakfast, there will be some adjustments that you will need to make to your schedule. For instance, you may need to make an extra effort to wake up 15 minutes earlier, or perhaps you may need to spend a little more time at night to make some preparations for the next day's breakfast.

Points to ponder

If you or your child have trouble waking up on time in the morning, consider going to bed earlier and setting an earlier bedtime for him. You should also get into the habit of doing a stock-take of your available breakfast foods, especially quick or instant foods such as whole grain cereals. There's nothing worse than waking up all ready to have a great breakfast but finding an empty box!

Other quick-fixes you can consider are packs of ready-to-drink UHT milk, yoghurt, or granola bars. Another excellent option for a quick breakfast are fruits (e.g. apples, pears, or bananas, wholemeal bread with cheese/ tuna or wholegrain cereals with milk). Breakfast really is the most important meal of the day, so get your family off to a great start with a healthy breakfast! **PP**

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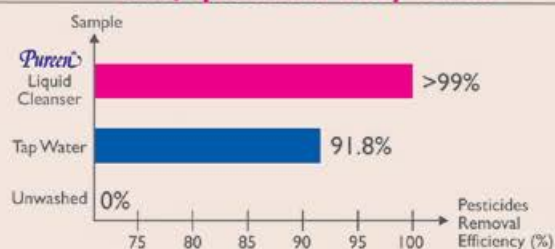
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Nutrition & Healthy Living

- Complementary Feeding
- Nutri Tips and Insights
- Breastfeeding
- Healthy Recipes



Cut the Sugar,

Reduce Health Risk

By **Dr Tee E Siong**, President, Nutrition Society of Malaysia

Sugar is a commonly used ingredient in many recipes for a variety of foods and drinks that many Malaysians love. Frequent consumption of foods and drinks high in sugar will result in excessive intake of calories. If these extra calories are not “burned” up in the body through physical activities, the person is said to be in positive energy balance.

However, there is nothing positive about this condition, as the excess energy is deposited as fat in the body. This situation can easily lead to weight gain and obesity, both of which are recognised risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as type 2 diabetes and coronary heart diseases.

The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines (MDG) emphasise limiting the intake of sugar, regardless of whether it is used in foods or drinks. Similarly, the World Health Organisation (WHO) also strongly recommends that the intake of free sugars (i.e. both added sugars and sugars that are naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juice, and fruit juice concentrates) be limited to less than 10% of a person's total energy intake. This recommendation applies to both adults and children.

For instance, if your child is between 7-9 years old, his daily energy requirement is 1800kcal (for girls, it is 1600kcal). Thus, his maximum daily sugar intake from all foods and drinks should not exceed 180kcal. What

this means in terms of amount of sugar is 9 teaspoons or 45 grams of sugar per day. If a child consumes a can of soft drink or a piece of chocolate cake (see table on the next page), he would have reached the maximum recommended daily sugar intake.

Watch out for the sugary traps

It is often easy to have a high sugar intake as there are many added sugars in food and drinks. You have to be more alert in order to reduce any excessive intake of any foods and drinks that are sugar-rich.

As a consumer, you will have to be more savvy in learning how to identify the ‘hidden & added’ sugars that pre-packaged foods may contain. For instance, you can look for the amount of sugars in the nutrition information panel (NIP) of all ready-to-drink beverages. For other pre-packaged foods, you may not be able to find the sugar content on the NIP as it is not required by law at this time. An alternative way to gauge the amount of

sugar in pre-packaged foods is to look at the ingredient list. Any added sugars should be listed here. There are many names for added sugars, such as sucrose, brown sugar, corn syrup, fructose, maltose, *gula melaka*, or molasses.

There are also other information on the food label that can guide you in looking for lower sugar content products. Look for claims on the label that say: “lower sugar” or “free of sugar”. However, you need to be wary if a claim says: no sugar added, as the product can still have high amount of naturally occurring sugar!

Unfortunately, there are also many other foods and drinks that do not have the NIP for you to look at. These ‘hidden’ sugars are present in foods and drinks that are sold in restaurants, cafes, coffee shops and street vendors. These include the many *kuih* and desserts that many of us simply cannot resist. So just how much sugar is contained in some of these foods and drinks? Here’s a list of some common sugar-rich foods and drinks and the amount of sugar they contain:



Food/Beverage	Amount of sugar contained in each serving	
	Teaspoons	Grams
Carbonated drinks (325 ml per can)	7-10	35-50
Chocolate cake (110 g per serving)	15	75
<i>Kuih koci</i> (40-50 g per piece)	2 ¼	11
Doughnut (45-55 g per piece)	1 ¾	9
Chocolate ice cream (11-15 g per popsicle)	2-3	10-15
Candies (28 g per serving)	4	20
Cookies (34 g per serving – approx. 3 pieces)	2	10
Cupcakes (110 g per serving)	6	30
<i>Bingka ubi kayu</i> (70-90 g per piece)	4 ¼	21



Cut sugar, lower your risk



Ask any nutritionist and he or she will tell you to avoid eating excessive amounts of total fat, trans-fat, sugars and salt in order to lower your risk of obesity and related NCDs. Reducing your intake of sugar-rich foods and beverages is an important step to get you started on living a healthy lifestyle.

Remember, NCDs do not discriminate as they can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity, so eliminate its chances of striking you. Start by reducing your intake of sugar today. Here are some tips to help you get started:

1) Eat less sugary foods:

- Choose cakes, *kuih*, or other sweet desserts with less sugar (use less sugar if you are making your own; the sugar used in most recipes can be safely reduced without affecting the taste too much).
- Simply eat less of such cakes, *kuih* or sweet desserts! Substitute these with fresh fruits instead.
- Eat foods that are NOT sugar-rich more frequently.
- Avoid eating sugar-rich foods between-meals or close to bedtime.
- When buying pre-packaged foods, check the ingredients list – bear in mind that the ingredients are always listed in order starting from the largest quantity used. Thus, if sugar is one of the first few items listed, that means the food or drink is high in sugar. If the NIP

includes sugar, check out the amount contained in the product. Opt for products with a lower sugar content if available.

2) Drink less sugary beverages:

- Water is the drink of choice – avoid sugar-rich beverages such as soft drinks and syrups/cordials.
- Limit the use of sugar and sweetened condensed milk/ filled milk when you make your own drinks – just one teaspoon per cup will do.
- When ordering drinks at the *mamak* or your local *kopitiam*, make it a point to request for ‘*kurang manis*’ or less sweet.
- Limit your consumption of sugar-rich concoctions such as *cendol* and *air batu campur* (ABC).
- Avoid drinking sugar-rich beverages between-meals or close to bedtime.
- When buying ready-to-drink beverages, check the amount of sugar from the NIP to find out how sugar-rich it is. Opt for products with a lower sugar content. **PP**

An educational collaboration with



Nutrition Society of Malaysia



Inspire Your Kids to Eat Healthy!

By **Prof Norimah A.Karim**, Nutritionist & Honorary Secretary of Nutrition Society of Malaysia

Results from a 2013 study led by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM) which looked at the breakfast habits of Malaysian schoolchildren aged six to 17 years (as detailed in this issue's feature) revealed that 28% of them were either overweight or obese.

Children who have obesity are more likely to become obese adults. Obesity is associated with an increased risk of a number of serious health conditions including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer and other non-communicable diseases. Furthermore, childhood obesity and overweight are also related to anxiety and depression which can lead to low self-esteem and lower self-reported quality of life.

Hence, it is important for parents to start teaching their kids about healthy eating (and living) early on. Good dietary habits practiced from young are more likely to stick and be carried on into adulthood.

Here are a few fun tips on how to encourage and inspire your children to eat healthily.

1 Cook Together

- Doing things together with your children is always a great way to bond.
- Cook together on the weekends or whenever you're free, don't force it or you and your child will lose interest and give up. It would be a good idea to plan and prepare in advance.
- It is a good opportunity for you to teach them about cooking, the menu, ingredients used, food preparation, food hygiene, equipment used, healthy eating and good dietary habits.
- Create new healthy recipes together and experiment with new ingredients.
- Let your child try new things appropriate for his age (with proper supervision); mixing and rolling meatballs, grinding spices with a pestle and mortar, crushing garlic, tossing salad, peeling an apple, mashing a potato, etc.

- Dress the meal plate to make it look appealing with foods from different texture, colour and taste. There are loads of fun and creative ideas you can find online to help you get started.
- Create and keep a family recipe book of all your family favourites and include a photo of your dishes.

2 Play a Game

- The more your child knows about making healthy choices and why they're considered healthy in the first place the better.
- You can inspire a habit for healthy choices by educating your children with fun games.
- For example, when going to the store to buy groceries, bring your child along and have them find a healthier option for a specific food item by referring to its nutrition information.
- Or, when you have finished grocery shopping, play a game where they need to sort the goods according to where they belong on the Food Pyramid.

3 Plant a Family Garden

- Kids are more likely to want to enjoy the fruits of their own labour.

- This is a good opportunity to spend quality family time.
- It teaches kids where fresh foods come from and raise their interest in healthy foods.
- The process of growing their own food makes them interested and connected to it. It is also a great time to teach kids about good nutrition.
- Examples of foods that are easy to grow and do not require that much space include tomatoes, lady's finger, chilli, spring onion, and beans sprout.

4 Award Efforts to Eat Healthy

- Create a table where your child can cross off a food/drink they ate for that particular day.
- For achieving the milestones for the whole week or month, you can reward your child with a trip to the zoo or cycling in the neighbourhood, going to the park, something fun involving physical activity. Never use food as a reward or bribe!
- Milestones can be set according to the amount of serving per day as recommended in the Malaysian Food Pyramid.
- When planning weekly meals, remember to incorporate the principles of B.M.V.



Malaysian Food Pyramid



B

1. Balance

To eat a balanced meal, your diet should contain a combination of foods from all the food groups in the Pyramid.

M

2. Moderation

Eat the right amounts of foods by observing the number of servings recommended for each food group. This will help you maintain a healthy weight and optimize your body's metabolic process.

V

3. Variety

Consume different types of foods from each food group so that you get all the different nutrients that your body needs. No one food contains all the nutrients our body needs.

Ultimately, we want our children to make smart decisions for themselves. Hence, this is why learning about good nutrition is so important. A big part of getting them to do so is for us parents to model good eating and buying behaviours, as well as devising playful ways to encourage awareness and develop the lifelong skill of making good dietary choices. **PP**

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Eating Fresh Safely

By **Dr Roseline Yap**, Nutritionist & Council Member, Nutrition Society of Malaysia

Eating fresh food is often deemed to be a healthier choice. The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines also recommends including more fresh foods in our daily diet such as fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, meat, seafood for our daily nutritional needs.

In today's busy lifestyle, it has become more challenging for working parents to eat fresh foods daily. Processed foods would still form a part of our diet. For some foods like grains and cereals (rice, oats, wheat) and milk, various processing methods upon harvesting are required to retain its shelf life before it gets to the consumers.

Fresh from the farm

In choosing fresh foods we need to be mindful of several factors such as they spoil easily and are prone to contamination. Do not assume that all fresh foods are free of contaminants as food contamination can occur in any of the following four areas before it reaches the market and to the consumers.

The first area is during production. There have been cases of contaminants (e.g. disease outbreak) affecting crops or animals. In the case of foods that are caught or harvested such as fish, there have also been cases of high levels of mercury that have made the entire catch unfit for human consumption.

The second area is during storage. The risk of contamination and spoilage can occur when fresh foods are not stored properly, especially in the correct temperature or when they are exposed to pests such as cockroaches and rats.

The third area is during the distribution of fresh foods to the market. Again, environmental factors such as



Did you know?

Foodborne illnesses typically occur within three days of eating contaminated foods, but it also depends on the degree of contamination. Your body may show symptoms within 20 minutes or as late as six weeks later. Common symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting, and flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever, headache, and body ache).

temperature differences or exposure to dust and pollutants during the transportation of perishable foods for the consumers can contribute to the risk of contamination and spoilage.

Lastly, improper preparation methods (either poor hygiene or unsanitary practices) during the handling of food can also cause the contamination of fresh foods.

Selecting fresh foods safely

The possibility of fresh foods being contaminated should not deter you from avoiding fresh foods. There are several tips on how you can select fresh foods safely and avoid consuming contaminated foods which can lead to foodborne illness such as infections caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites or poisoning caused by harmful toxins or chemicals.

Fresh foods are not limited to just fruits and vegetables. They also include meats, poultry, eggs, and seafood too. Here are some tips you can follow in order to select, store, and prepare your fresh foods safely:

1. Pick it Right

- Choose unblemished fruits and vegetables which are not dry, bruised or damaged. Make sure there is no discolouration, do not have a rotten smell and are free from pests such as insects. It should look clean and fresh.
- As for pre-packaged or pre-cut fresh foods such as fruits, only select those that have been refrigerated or kept on ice.
- When choosing fresh seafood, it should not have a pungent or rotten odour. For fish, the eyes should be clear and not sunken, the flesh should be firm and resilient, and the gills should be bright red and slime-free. Shrimps or prawns should have shiny, translucent flesh and should not smell. Crabs should be bought live as they spoil very quickly.
- Freshly butchered meat or poultry should have firm and resilient flesh. Avoid buying meat or poultry that have a pungent smell and if it feels sticky or slimy to the touch. If the meat or poultry has developed these characteristics, it should not be bought or even used for cooking (for instance, if you have bought the meat or poultry earlier but did not store it properly, it can become sticky or slimy to the touch).
- Select eggs with uncracked and clean shells. Do not purchase expired eggs with a rotten smell.
- Keep your fresh fruits and vegetables separated from raw meat, poultry, and seafood – this rule always applies, whether you are bringing them back from the market or when storing them in the refrigerator or freezer.



2. Store it Right

- Fresh fruits and vegetables should be kept in a clean refrigerator that maintains a temperature of 4°C or below. Put your mind at ease by checking the temperature with a thermometer.
- Ensure that all pre-packaged and pre-cut fresh foods are kept in the refrigerator. You may opt to transfer them into sealable containers.
- Always ensure that raw foods are kept separated from cooked foods. Also, always ensure that fruits and vegetables are stored separately from raw meat, poultry, or seafood.
- Take extra care if you need to thaw raw meat, poultry, or seafood in the refrigerator to ensure that they do not contaminate any of your fruits and vegetables or other cooked food that may be kept in the refrigerator.
- Refrigerate eggs that will not be used immediately for cooking and do not leave eggs out to 'thaw' for more than two hours. The condensation that forms will encourage bacterial growth or allow bacteria to move into the eggs.

3. Prepare it Right

- Wash your hands and all kitchen utensils (knife, cutting board, etc) used for the preparation of foods.
- Wash raw foods thoroughly with running water. It is recommended to soak fresh vegetables briefly in water to remove physical residues such as sand and small pebbles before washing it again under running water. Avoid using soap or detergent when washing raw foods.
- Use a dedicated knife and chopping board for fruits and vegetables and another set for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Cut off and dispose any damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables, and discard if it appears rotten.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables that will be peeled should also be washed as this prevents dirt and bacteria from contaminating any of your work surfaces.
- Use a soft brush to clean the surface of tubers such as potatoes and turnips.

Fit for human consumption

Remember, while you should eat fresh foods as often as possible, it is also not practical to completely remove processed or pre-packaged foods from our diet. With the advancement of technology, several processed foods nowadays are fortified with additional vitamins or minerals which can meet our daily nutritional needs.

Even frozen vegetables and fruits can be a healthy choice as the process of freezing retains a good level of nutrients, especially if they are frozen while fresh. Thus, on the whole, it is recommended to include more fresh foods in our daily diet in addition to processed or pre-packaged foods and frozen foods. **PP**

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Don't Miss Out on Milk's Benefits

By **Prof Dr Poh Bee Koon**, Nutritionist

Milk is an excellent source of many essential nutrients, which are important for your child's proper growth and development, as it is rich in essential nutrients, such as Vitamin D, calcium, and many others. Unfortunately, several studies indicate that Malaysian children and adolescents are not consuming adequate quantities of milk and milk products.

This trend of children drinking less milk as they grow older is made more troubling by the fact that it also corresponds with an increased intake of less nutritious sugary beverages, such as soft drinks or fruit-flavoured drinks. These poor dietary habits contribute to the double burden of childhood obesity and malnutrition.

Not getting enough

The South East Asian Nutrition Surveys (SEANUTS) found that almost half of Malaysian children between six months and 12 years surveyed had vitamin D insufficiency. Their dietary intake did not follow the Recommended Nutrient Intakes (RNI) for Malaysia 2005, with more than a third failing to achieve the requisite figures for energy, calcium and Vitamin D.

Both Vitamin D and calcium are critical for a growing child as they play a major role in bone health. Vitamin D helps your child's body to absorb calcium, which is important for his physical growth and development. It also helps improve his bone density, thus making it less likely that his bones will break as he ages.

Here are some other foods that contain:

- **Vitamin D:** Milk and milk products, fatty fish (e.g. tuna, salmon), fish liver oil, egg yolk, or foods fortified with vitamin D.
- **Calcium:** Milk and milk products, vegetables (e.g. spinach, watercress, mustard leaves, *cekur manis*, tapioca leaves, *kai-lan* and broccoli), fish with edible bones (e.g. canned sardines and anchovies), beans and bean products, tofu, and *tempeh* (fermented soybeans).

Malaysian kids not drinking enough



The results of a study on Malaysian children aged 1 to 10 years entitled “*Milk Drinking Patterns among Malaysian Urban Children of Different Household Income Status*” show that on average, milk consumption is less than two servings a day, where one serving is equal to one glass (or 200ml). The SEANUTS Malaysia results show only about half a serving per day on average being consumed among school-aged children. This is less than the recommended two to three servings of milk or milk products a day.

This practice of not drinking sufficient milk from a young age may cause the behaviour to become an

ingrained habit, which carries over into your child’s adult life. Therefore, it is better to start providing milk as a healthy beverage choice and to encourage him to consume the recommended amount of milk and milk products all throughout childhood. Establishing a habit of drinking milk early would help ensure that he will continue to do so as an adult (who should still be taking one to two servings of milk or milk products daily).

Do bear in mind that milk and milk products are an excellent source of nutrition even for adults, and there is absolutely no reason why your child should drink less milk during his growing years.

‘Milking’ the most out of a cup

With so much going for it, milk is one of the most nutritious beverages your child can take. Here are some simple tips to help him meet his recommended daily serving by making it more palatable.

■ Chill it!

Serve your child cold milk. You can either refrigerate the milk beforehand or add a few ice cubes just before serving it.



■ Mix it with drinks!

Use fresh, UHT or powdered milk instead of sweetened condensed milk when making beverages, such as coffee or tea.



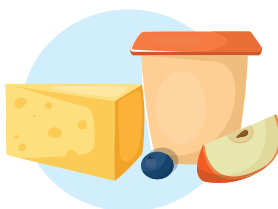
■ Shake it up!

Make a milkshake or smoothie that features milk as the main ingredient. You can make many different varieties just by adding fruits, biscuits, peanut butter or chocolate to it. Get creative and make your own house specialty!



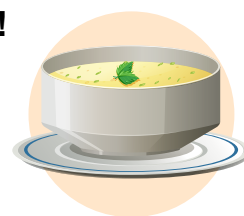
■ Lactose intolerance?

Children who are lactose intolerant can usually tolerate small amounts of milk (approximately ½ cup, taken at intervals throughout the day. Alternatively, let your child have fermented milk products, such as yoghurt or cheese.



■ Add it to your recipes!

Look for recipes that feature milk and incorporate them into your repertoire of meals for your family. It could range from baking cookies, making puddings, or even adding it to mushroom or chicken soup in order to make it creamy. You can even add milk to scrambled eggs for a delicious dish. Alternatively, use milk as a replacement for coconut milk (*santan*).



■ Great ‘pick-me-up’!

After a long day at school or a tiring morning or afternoon of activities (e.g. football, badminton, or swimming), an ice-cold cup of milk may be just the thing your child needs to help him recover. Flavoured milk is also acceptable provided he does not drink it excessively. There is even scientific evidence that shows milk is better for restoring the body’s fluid balance after intense exercise. **PP**

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Goodness in every drop!

Healthy Cooking & Fun with Your Kids

Cooking at home with your kids is great fun. It's a way to spend quality time together and learn about healthy eating, and how to prepare meals, snacks and drinks that are flavourful and nutritious at the same time. These two recipes are a win-win for both you and your child; it's easy to prepare, healthy and bursting with flavour (and colour too!).



Fried Macaroni

(Serves 4)

Ingredients

- 150 g (1 ⅔ cups) macaroni, cooked and drained
- 200 g (¾ cup) lean beef, minced
- 30 g (6 pieces) fresh button mushrooms
- 30 g (½) red capsicum
- 30 g (½) green capsicum
- 120 ml (½ cup) tomato sauce
- 80 ml (⅓ cup) tomatoes
- 180 ml (¾ cup) homemade beef stock
- 26 g (2 tbsp) margarine
- 25 g (5 cloves) garlic
- 3 g (½) green chilli
- 3 g (½) red chilli
- 50 g (2) onions
- Salt to taste
- Garnishing: coriander leaves, fried sliced shallots

} sliced

} chopped



Method

1. Heat margarine in a wok and sauté chopped ingredients until fragrant.
2. Add tomato sauce, tomato paste, beef stock and minced beef.
3. Stir and simmer until beef is cooked and tender.
4. Add macaroni, capsicum, and mushroom. Season with salt.
5. Garnish before serving.

Nutrient Content Per Serving	
Calorie 298 kcal	Carbohydrate 41.5 g
Protein 17.6 g	Fat 6.8 g



Fruit Skewers

(Serves 5)

Ingredients

- 10 wooden skewers, soaked for 2-3 minutes
- 200 g (1 whole) ripe mango, peeled
- 200 g (2 whole) oranges, peeled
- 200 g (2 large) red apples, peeled
- 70 g (10 small) strawberries
- 20 g (1½ tbsp) margarine
- 3 ml (½ tsp) lemon juice
- 80 g (½ cup) honey
- 250 ml (1 cup) yoghurt or vanilla ice-cream

Method

1. Cut mango, oranges and apples into 3 cm cubes.
2. Thread the cut fruits (mango, oranges, red apples, strawberries) on to the skewers and place on the oven tray.
3. Blend margarine, lemon juice and honey in a saucepan and stir until mixture is smooth.
4. Coat the fruit well with mixture.
5. Place skewers on a lightly-greased grill, and grill until warm.
6. Cool and serve with yoghurt or ice-cream.



Recipes courtesy of "Nutritionists' Choice Cookbook, Vol 1: Healthy Recipes for Your Little Ones" by Nutrition Society of Malaysia. To purchase this recipe book which includes 50 recipes, please email: president@nutriweb.org.my

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Nutrient Content Per Serving (2 skewers)	
Calorie 187 kcal	Carbohydrate 32.9 g
Protein 4.0 g	Fat 4.4 g



Nutrition Society of Malaysia

How Diet Affects Our Gut Health

A healthy gut is critical to overall health and an unhealthy gut can contribute to a wide range of diseases or disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's disease, and irritable bowel syndrome. Deterioration in gut health has also been associated with increased risk of non-communicable diseases (e.g. obesity, diabetes, cancer).

By **Dr Mahenderan Appukutty**, Nutritionist & Council Member, Nutrition Society of Malaysia

Components of the Digestive System

The digestive system is made up of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, the liver, pancreas, and gallbladder. The hollow organs that make up the GI tract include the mouth, oesophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum and anus.

Bacteria in the GI tract (aka gut flora or microbiome) are also considered integral components of the system because they assist with digestion and other functions of the gut. From chewing to bowel emptying, all these different components work together to complete the elaborate task of digesting foods (solid or liquids) that we consume each day.

Too Much of One Thing

The digestive system is the first thing that comes into contact with the foods we eat. The digestive system converts the foods we eat into their simplest forms. Though the components of the system are tough and resilient, years of abuse and bad lifestyle habits can take its toll.

Fat & Oil, Spoils

The more high-fat food you eat, the more bile and lipase your body needs to digest them. If you eat too much, you may overwhelm the capacity of your liver as well as pancreas to synthesize sufficient bile and lipase to help digest the fat. If the liver and pancreas cannot keep up, this causes indigestion. Overworking the liver and pancreas over time can also cause it to malfunction that can lead to fatty liver disease, insulin resistance and diabetes.



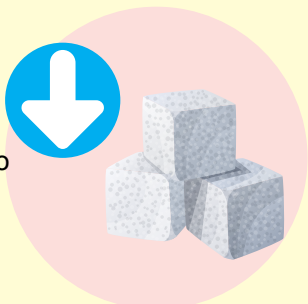
Salt to Taste

Salt or sodium chloride, is essential for maintaining fluid balance within your cells, for contracting your muscles and transmitting nerve impulses. Your body also needs salt to maintain the proper stomach acidic level (pH) and also produce the hydrochloric acid. Salt also plays a critical role in helping your digestive system absorb nutrients. Eating too much however, can increase the risk of gastric ulcer, stomach cancer and high blood pressure. Too little, and you will not be able to produce enough acid to breakdown and absorption of foods which then causes indigestion.



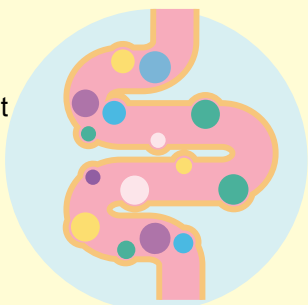
You're My Sugar

As part of the digestive system, our pancreas releases insulin to maintain healthy blood sugar balance. However, too much sugar causes it to either release too much insulin or not enough. This can lead to either hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) or hyperglycaemia (high blood sugar). The liver also uses the sugar fructose also called as fruit sugar, to make fat. Too much refined sugar and high-fructose corn syrup causes a fatty build-up that can lead to liver disease. Bad gut bacteria also use sugar as food to multiply their colony and causes tummy problems.



Messing Up Gut Microbiome

Bacteria in our gut helps to fight off pathogenic invaders, digesting certain nutrients and drugs, creating important nutrients, maintaining the integrity of our gut and are associated with the smooth functioning of our immune system. A disruption in the normal gut microbiome puts our gut health at risk by exposing it to infection and harmful invaders. The imbalance of gut microbiome is caused by poor dietary habits, unhealthy environment (pollution), improper use of antibiotics, etc.



Besides the food you consume, eating habits can also affect your gut health. As parents, practice these good dietary habits and educate your kids about the gut and food from the beginning:

1. **Chew food properly before swallowing and do not eat too fast.** Eating too fast can cause indigestion.
2. **Do not skip meals;** skipping meals increases your tendency to overeat at the next while eating regular meals each day helps digestion.
3. **Do not overeat** or resort to eating as a therapy for emotional distress. Overeating can lead to indigestion, heartburn and acid reflux.
4. **Go easy with the snacking** and choose healthier snacking options (e.g. fruits, nuts).
5. **Avoid eating late at night,** close to your bedtime. When you lie down for bed too soon after eating you can get heartburn and acid reflux. Then this will disturb the sleeping hours.
6. **Eat more fibre-rich foods and food that contains prebiotics** to encourage growth of good gut bacteria and improve bowel movement. You can also consume probiotics, which replenish the gut with certain beneficial bacteria from sources such as tempeh, kimchi, yoghurt, and cultured-milk drinks.



Strike A Balance

Eating too much of any one food is not ideal because no one type of food has all the nutrients to maintain your gut and overall body health. In principle, you should eat a balanced meal that is moderately portioned and has a variety of foods from each food group as suggested in the Malaysian Food Pyramid. You and your family can achieve better gut health by being mindful of what you eat and practising a healthier lifestyle together. **PP**

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Billions of Good Bacteria for a Healthy Digestive System

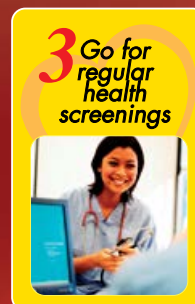
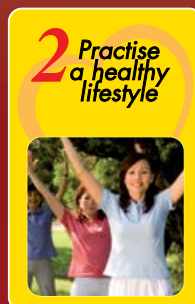
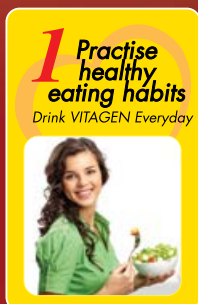
Why is your digestive health so important?

In Malaysia, diseases of the digestive system are the 5th principal cause of death and 7th principal cause of admission in government hospitals in 2011.*

A healthy digestive system is central to your overall health and wellbeing. Not only does it process food and transport important nutrients, vitamins, and minerals throughout your body, it is your body's first line of defence against diseases because 70% of your immune system lies in your digestive tract.

What can you do to improve your digestive health?

It's simple. What you need to do is to practise these simple steps TODAY!



Lactobacillus cultures (good bacteria)



Are all bacteria bad?

No, not all bacteria are bad for your health, there are good bacteria too. Your digestive tract is home to trillions of bacteria. A healthy digestive system should have a healthy balance of 85% good bacteria and 15% bad bacteria.

What happens inside?



- Good bacteria fights bad bacteria for nutrients



- Good bacteria blocks the growth of bad bacteria



- Good bacteria kills bad bacteria

What should you do when bad bacteria overpowers the good bacteria?

Unhealthy lifestyle, stress, unbalanced diet, aging, lack of exercise, consumption of antibiotics, and bacterial infection in the gut can cause microflora imbalance. You can replenish the good bacteria in your digestive system by consuming probiotics.

What are probiotics?

According to the World Gastroenterology Organisation, probiotics are live microbes that have been shown in controlled human studies to induce measurable benefits on intestinal health and immunity. **

* Data from the Ministry of Health, Health Facts 2012.

** Data from the World Gastroenterology Organisation.

Goodness of Probiotics

Probiotics can benefit your digestion if consumed regularly.

- Helps reduce risk of intestinal disturbances such as constipation, diarrhoea, ulcers, bloating, belching, bad breath, allergy, heartburn, and nausea
- Helps maintain a healthy bacteria balance by keeping the good bacteria in high levels
- Helps improve bowel movement
- Helps improve tolerance to milk
- Helps boost immune system
- Helps replenish good bacteria after taking antibiotics
- Helps with digestion

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Understanding Pregnancy Stretch Marks

By **Dr Krishna H Kumar**, Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, and Past President of Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Malaysia

Stretch marks are a common occurrence that plagues many pregnant ladies. They can appear on the torso, legs, and buttocks. Although they do not represent a health risk, they can be uncomfortable as they may itch. Perhaps the worst aspect is of course, from the cosmetic viewpoint!

Why do they form?

Stretch marks that occur during pregnancy (or *striae gravidarum*) are caused by the physical stretching of the skin. Although our skin is elastic and can expand/contract, during periods of sudden weight gain, the skin does not have enough time to adjust. If the body expands faster than the skin can, it will tear the skin thus leaving a scar, or stretch mark.

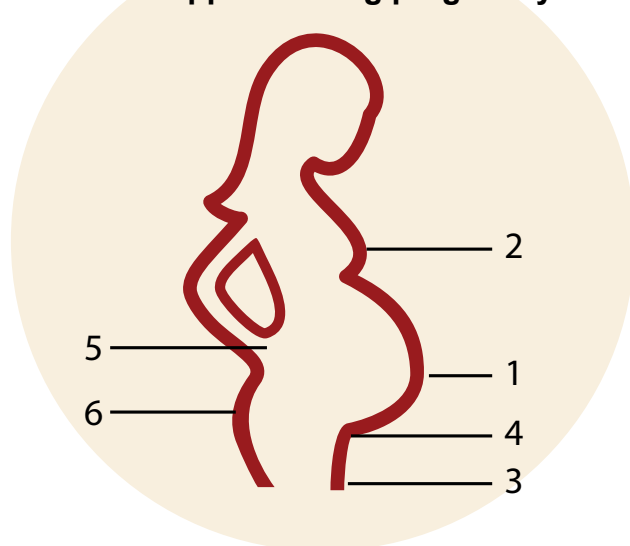
Did you know?

Stretch marks are not exclusive to pregnant women; anyone who experiences sudden weight gain can suffer from stretch marks, e.g. during puberty, medical conditions such as Marfan Syndrome or Cushing's Syndrome, or prolonged use of corticosteroid creams/lotions. For instance, male athletes who suddenly bulk up as a result of weight training can suffer from stretch marks.

Stretch marks typically become visible around the third trimester of pregnancy. They may start off as pinkish lines or marks on your skin and it may feel itchy. The stretch marks will gradually 'grow' longer and wider, and their colour may become redder or more purple. As it 'matures', the colour begins fading into a pale white or silver colour.

Stretch marks generally appear on the abdomen or parts of the body where a lot of body fat is stored such as the breasts, thighs, hips, lower back and buttocks. While it is not possible to prevent stretch marks, there are steps you can take to minimise their effect. One of the most effective is by applying skin care products that help maximize skin elasticity, thus ensuring it remains supple and well-hydrated.

Common parts of the body where stretch marks appear during pregnancy.



Preventing stretch marks

The best thing you can do is to focus your efforts on preventing stretch marks as much as possible. You should focus on prevention as the scars caused by stretch marks cannot be healed – they can be reduced, but you may never be able to completely get rid of them.

Some of the factors that influence the severity of stretch marks include the pregnant mom's age, her weight gain during pregnancy, her baby's birth weight, family history of stretch marks, and also the gestational age at delivery. While many of these factors are beyond your control, there are two main factors which you do have a say over, namely:

- **Avoid excessive weight gain:** make sure you consult with your doctor to find out what is the healthy range of weight gain you should be aiming for during your pregnancy. The old adage of 'eating for two' will not serve you well as it could lead to gaining too much weight. This would, in turn, mean a much higher risk, both in terms of quantity and severity, of stretch marks.
- **Take care of yourself:** By taking good care of your overall health, you will also be taking care of your skin. Some fruits and vegetables are rich in antioxidants which will help you maintain healthy skin. Do remember to keep yourself well-hydrated at all times too by drinking at least eight glasses of water a day.



Stretch marks normally become less noticeable as you start to lose the extra weight that was gained during pregnancy as your skin will gradually shrink back to normal. Nutrition and exercise are important, so be sure to consult with your doctor on the foods you should take and what types of exercise are suitable.

Stretch marks: not the end of the world

Remember, stretch marks represent no danger to your physical health. However, depending on its severity, some people may find stretch marks to be a major concern as it could cause emotional and psychological distress. While there are several options available that claim to be effective, there is little evidence that they work as advertised.

The most helpful thing is to have a supportive partner who will be there for you, who is willing to lend you an ear when you need to rant and rave, who will be there to console you and lift your spirits when you need it, and above all, provide you with the love and attention that you need. **PP**

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When Your Spouse Has A Mental Illness

By **Dato' Dr Andrew Mohanraj**, Consultant Psychiatrist and Malaysian Medical Health Association Deputy President

According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey, the prevalence of mental health problems in Malaysia, among adults showed an increasing trend from 10.7% in 1996 to 29.2% in 2015. More than half were married individuals.

It's difficult when a loved one is experiencing a mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depressive disorder. In our society, stigma of having mental illness can be perceived as shameful, not only to the person suffering from such an illness but also to the family.

Coping with emerging symptoms of mental illness in a loved one can be even more challenging as the whole family is affected emotionally, socially, physically, and financially. This, in turn, can lead to relationship problems and even estrangement.

Understandably the spouse would be the first to bear the brunt of these symptoms. This can lead to considerable physical and emotional strain which can be very overwhelming to the spouse.

Types of Mental Illness and Issues Commonly Faced in Marriage

Depression

Characterised by persistent low mood and disinterest in pleasurable activities in life. Depression is associated with poor sleep, poor appetite, lethargy, decreased concentration, and substance and alcohol abuse. Untreated depression can be serious and sometimes fatal as it puts the affected individual at a high risk of suicide. The good news is that depression is highly treatable. Once diagnosed, most people who get help report substantial relief.

Bipolar disorder

Refers to two extremes poles; one pole represents a 'high', often a manic phase characterized by elevated mood, exaggerated optimism and self-confidence, lavish spending, reckless behaviour and sexual promiscuity, among other traits. During this phase they can be perceived to be fun-loving, interesting, upbeat and full of energy. On the contrary, the "other pole" represents a depressed mood, being withdrawn from others and even suicidal. Such erratic behaviour can be quite challenging to the spouse.

Approaching your Spouse

Use a calm and loving tone while approaching your spouse to discuss treatment. Do not be angry or emotional because your spouse could potentially respond with uncontrollable anger.

In previously diagnosed cases but approaching relapse, it is important to reason out the need to comply with treatment and come up with an agreement. For example some people with bipolar disorder recognize that they may go on a spending spree when they are not well and therefore, come to an agreement with the spouse to take charge of their finances.

On the other hand, if your spouse repeatedly refuses treatment, you must protect yourself from abuse or being emotionally decompensated by your involvement. This is particularly true in the case of bipolar disorder where abuse can take the form of verbal, physical and financial abuse.



Like depression, those with bipolar disorder have a tendency to abuse alcohol and narcotics. Their spouse often serves as an outlet for their overwhelming anger, misbehaviour and financial misdemeanours. The spouse needs to remember that the person suffering from bipolar disorder does not directly control most of these behaviours. They are influenced by the imbalance of chemicals in their brain.

Empower Yourself

Increase Knowledge

Learn more about your partner's illness. This will enable you to understand your spouse's behaviour. Similarly, talk to your doctor about your role in your partner's illness. This will allow you to become a positive force in your spouse's treatment.

Find Support

People who have gone through similar experiences can provide you with the best support. This can be a relative, a friend, or a person you met at an awareness talk.

Take Care of Yourself

It is important to take care of your own needs. Eat a balanced and healthy diet with plenty of exercise and adequate rest. Take some 'alone time' to relax and unwind. Making time to do things you enjoy will help you keep your stress levels in check to prevent burn out or falling into depression yourself.

Ease Your Daily Burden

Your partner may not be able to work, at least temporarily, and you may have to support the family financially. You'll also need to drive to and from appointments, and undertake other tasks related to taking care of your partner on top of managing your children, the house and work responsibilities.

Do not hesitate to ask your relatives, or friends for help with these day-to-day activities. You will be surprised that many will be willing to come forward and help.

Hope and Fulfilment

The stigma of mental illness can make couples hesitant to look elsewhere for help, but by keeping the illness a secret, couples place an additional burden on themselves. Coping with a spouse with mental illness will take some time to get used to. Fortunately, despite the many challenges, with modern treatment, people with mental illnesses can still live a rich, fulfilling life – and as a spouse, so can you. **PP**

FINDING HELP AND SUPPORT

The following organisations are committed to helping families and caregivers of persons with mental illness. Seek support from whichever organisation that you think is suitable in your situation.

- Malaysian Mental Health Association (MMHA) - <http://mmha.org.my>
- The Befrienders KL - <http://www.befrienders.org.my>
- Alzheimer's Disease Foundation - <http://www.adfm.org.my/>
- National Alzheimer's Caregivers Network - <http://admalaysia.ning.com/> Mental Health Association - <http://d-home.org.my/>

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MMHA

Malaysian Mental Health Association

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- Digestive Health
- Allergy
- Paediatrics Issues
- Immunisation

Looking into Your Child's Eye Health

By **Professor Dr Visvaraja Subrayan**,
Senior Consultant Ophthalmologist

Paediatric ophthalmology is a speciality in ophthalmology concerned with eye diseases, visual development and vision care in children. Various eye diseases affect children in a way that is quite distinct from adult eye diseases, and fortunately most are treatable if detected early.

It is a fact that more than 80% of information a child receives, is obtained visually. Hence, early detection and treatment are both of utmost importance in promoting normal visual development and in preventing significant visual loss.

I will address a few common eye conditions encountered throughout my many years of clinical practice that I would like to share and highlight.

'Lazy eye' or amblyopia is reduced vision in an eye that has not received adequate use or visual stimulation during early childhood. Commonly, it results from either a 'squint' or a difference in image quality between two eyes due to refractive error as mentioned before. In both cases, one eye becomes dominant, suppressing the image of the other eye. If this condition persists, the weaker eye may eventually become impractical.



A child with right eye patching therapy for his left 'lazy eye'

Before treating amblyopia, we have to treat the underlying cause first. Spectacles are frequently prescribed to improve focusing of the eyes, and eye muscle surgery is performed to straighten the eyes. Subsequently, amblyopia treatment is carried out by patching or occluding one eye for a period ranging from weeks to years. The idea is to force the 'lazy eye' to work, thereby strengthening its vision. Alternatively, topical eye drops may be used to blur the vision of the fellow 'good eye' and eminently

force the 'lazy' one to work, but this is a less successful approach. An amblyopic eye may never develop good vision and may even become functionally blind if not treated early.

Another common condition encountered is misalignment of the eyes or better known as 'squint' (strabismus, Figure 1), whereby, the eye appears crossed, or drifts in respect to the other eye. The crossing may be occasional or constant. Signals from the crossed eye are "turned off" by the brain to avoid double vision and will, later on, lead to 'lazy eye' (amblyopia) and or loss of three-dimensional or stereo vision. The treatment depends on the severity and type of squint and encompasses glasses, patching of the eye and even corrective eye/strabismus surgery. It is a misnomer to think that a child can grow out of strabismus on its own and early treatment is imperative.

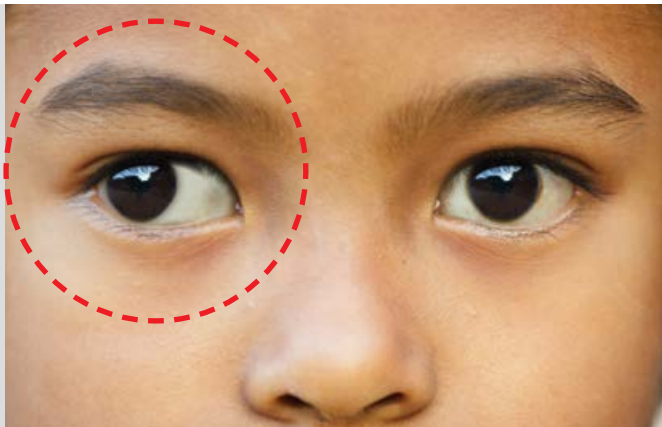


Figure 1: A child with right eyes squint (strabismus)

Abnormal refractive states of the eye such as myopia – short-sightedness, and hyperopia – long-sightedness, poses a common problem of late and can occur in children from a very young age. Refractive errors cause incorrect focusing of light onto the retina, leading to blurry images. As a result, the child may complain of frequent headaches, eye strain and difficulty with near or distant vision. Late detection and correction of refractive errors can ultimately lead to lazy eye. Altogether this can be avoided simply by prescribing corrective spectacles.

The child may have a white "cat eye" (leukocoria) which is more noticeable in photographs (Figure 2). Amongst the commonest cause of this in children is cataract. A cataract is an opacity of the lens in the eye. It can develop during pregnancy or in early childhood, and it can affect one or both eyes. Other signs to look for in a child with cataracts include

abnormal rapid eye movements, eye misalignment, or merely a child who is unable to see, particularly if both eyes are affected. The key difference in managing a child with cataract in comparison to adults is that it is crucial that the child is referred early so that surgical treatment can be carried out without delay to avoid permanent visual loss due to 'lazy eye'. It is evidenced that the earlier the surgery is performed, the better the visual outcome.

Leukocoria is also an ominous sign of another more serious ocular pathology which is a retinoblastoma. It is imperative to examine all children with leukocoria because of the potential life-threatening nature of retinoblastoma which is the most common eye cancer in children.



Figure 2: A child with left leukocoria (white "cat eye")

Most of the time, vision problems in children are not evident, and the best way to detect them early is to schedule routine comprehensive vision screenings with an ophthalmologist. Nevertheless, parents, as well as teachers, should be aware of signs that a child's vision is affected such as sitting too close to the television, squinting of the eye or tilting of the head, frequent eye rubbing, excessive tearing or glaring and receiving lower grades than usual. It is advisable that all children should have their eyes screened at six months of age, followed by a second eye exam at age three and once more before starting school. On the contrary, children with risk factors such as the history of premature birth or low birth weight should have their eyes examined earlier than six months of age followed by more frequent eye exams throughout childhood.

Lastly, I would like to emphasise and reassure that most of the eye diseases in children can be preventable or treatable if detected early. **PP**

Are You A 'Flu'-ent Parent?

By **Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail**, Consultant Paediatrician & Paediatric Cardiologist

Every year, influenza causes millions of infections, and 250,000-500,000 deaths of which an estimated 28,000-111,500 are children under 5 years, mostly from developing countries. Parents need to know more about the flu to better protect their children from it.

Flu or 'influenza', is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza A or B viruses. In Malaysia, influenza cases are seen all year round with peaks observed during the rainy season. In 2015, the Ministry of Health Malaysia recorded 12,133 influenza cases which were detected from 88 sentinel sites throughout the country. In the same year, 9 deaths were reported. These figures may well be higher since many cases go unreported, and even undiagnosed as influenza.

Signs Of Flu

Symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, headaches, and tiredness. A child may suffer from one or a combination of these symptoms.

Complications In Children

Recovery can be expected within several days to less than two weeks after onset of symptoms in healthy persons. However, children have a higher risk of developing serious complications which include:

- Chest infections - including pneumonia or bronchitis
- Worsening symptoms of existing medical conditions, including asthma, diabetes and lung problems
- Tonsillitis
- Otitis media
- Sinusitis
- Seizures
- Meningitis
- Encephalitis (brain inflammation).

Children At High-Risk Of Infection

- Children below the age of two whose immune system is not yet fully matured.
- Children with certain medical conditions (e.g. asthma, heart disease, kidney disorders, chronic lung disease).

Treating Your Child

If your child gets the flu, they should:

1. Get plenty of rest at home. Do not let your child go to school/day care, avoid infecting other children.
2. Hydrate adequately with plain water.
3. Cover their coughs and sneezes with a clean tissue or cloth and discard it properly into a bin. If neither are available, they should be taught to cover their mouths with their hands and wash them thoroughly afterwards.

HAND WASHING STEPS



Wet hands with water and apply soap



Rub hands palm to palm



Back of hands and between fingers



Palm to palm and between fingers



Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



Rotational rubbing thumb clasped in palm



Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers in palm



Rinse hands and dry

source: WHO, 2009

Influenza in children can also be treated with antiviral drugs which keep flu viruses from reproducing in the body. It only works against influenza viruses and must be prescribed by a doctor.

Get Vaccinated

The best way to protect your child from the flu is to get him or her vaccinated each year. It is recommended that children above 6 months get a seasonal flu vaccine from one of the two vaccine types:

Trivalent: protects against 3 flu viruses

- an influenza A (H1N1) virus
- an influenza A (H3N2) virus
- an influenza B virus (B/Victoria lineage)

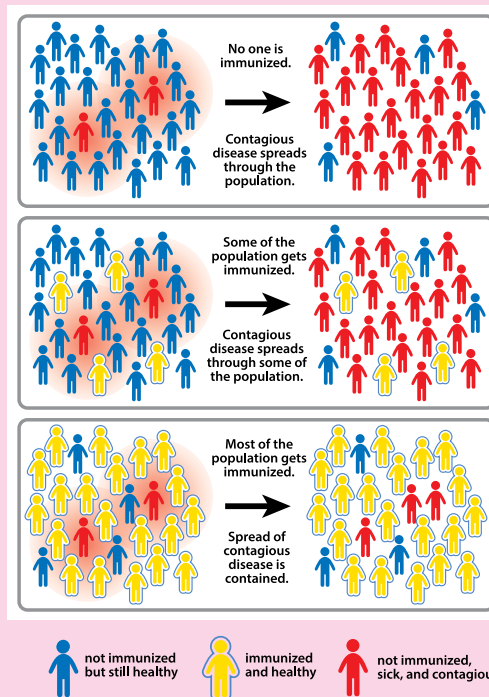
Quadrivalent: protects against 4 flu viruses

- an influenza A (H1N1) virus
- an influenza A (H3N2) virus
- two influenza B viruses (B/Victoria and B/Yamagata lineage)

Children younger than 6 months cannot be vaccinated. Therefore, those around them (e.g. parents, siblings, grandparents, caregivers) should be the ones to get vaccinated. You can do so at any public or private hospital or clinic nationwide after consulting your doctor.

Herd Immunity Protects Us All

Preferably we need to get enough people in the population vaccinated to indirectly protect those few who have not, cannot or did not receive them. This type of broad protection within the population is known as 'herd immunity'. Immunisation does not just protect the individual, it protects the whole community.



Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding are also encouraged to vaccinate because of the high-risk complications from flu. The influenza vaccine is safe to be administered at any gestation during pregnancy and also provides protection for the infant during the first six months of his/her life through the transfer of antibodies via the placenta.

Influenza is not a benign illness that can be taken lightly. Watch your child closely for symptoms of respiratory illness – especially fever – because flu can manifest to become severe in high-risk children. Parents should be more aware of the total impact of influenza in children so that we can decrease the burden of influenza on children and the wider society. **PP**

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Malaysian Paediatric Association



FIGHT THE FLU



The **flu** is a contagious illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It ranges from mild to severe and at times, can even lead to death.¹

Anyone can get the flu, even healthy people. But the people at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick are:¹



Those of any age with certain chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease



Children



Pilgrims undertaking Hajj or Umrah^{2,3}

- People aged ≥ 50 years*
- People with extreme obesity (BMI ≥ 40)
- Pregnant women
- Healthcare personnel
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities



Flu viruses circulate all year round. Both influenza A and B viruses are responsible for the seasonal flu epidemics that occur each year.⁴



A/H1N1



A/H3N2



B/YAMAGATA



B/VICTORIA

THE BEST WAY TO FIGHT AGAINST THE FLU IS BY PREVENTION WITH VACCINATION.^{5,6}



ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT THE 4-STRAIN INFLUENZA VACCINE THAT PROVIDES BROADER PROTECTION.

*Among adults, complications, hospitalisations, and deaths due to influenza are generally most common among those aged ≥ 65 years. However, adults aged ≥ 50 years are a priority group for vaccination because this group may be more likely to have chronic medical conditions that put them at higher risk of severe influenza illness. REFERENCES: 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key Facts About Influenza (Flu). Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>. Last accessed Jan 2017. 2. Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia. Health requirements and recommendations for Hajj and Umrah performers and those working in Hajj areas - 2015. Available at <http://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Hajj/HealthGuidelines/HealthGuidelinesDuringHajj/Pages/HealthRegulations1437.aspx>. Last accessed Jan 2017. 3. Tabung Haji. Immunization Information. Available at <http://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/immunization-information>. Last accessed Jan 2017. 4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Influenza (Flu) Viruses. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/viruses/>. Last accessed Jan 2017. 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm>. Last accessed Jan 2017. 6. World Health Organization. Influenza. Vaccine Use. Available at <http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/use/en/>. Last accessed Jan 2017.

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Safe Ways to Introduce Highly Allergenic Foods

By **Dr Amir Hamzah Abdul Latiff**, Consultant Paediatrician & Consultant Clinical Immunologist/Allergist (Adults & Paediatrics)



Does your family have a history of food allergies? Afraid to give your child her first taste of peanut butter? Do you dread to feed her fish, eggs or milk? Relax, here's how you can safely introduce potentially allergenic food to your baby.

Research has shown that compared to those with no family history of allergic disease, “high risk” children (one immediate family member with a history of any allergic disease) showed only a modest increase in risk of food allergy. However, the risk does increase significantly if there are two or more family members who are allergic.

Regardless, you can't help but feel worried for your child as you start to wean her off breastmilk and onto solids. As your baby grows, her nutritional needs increase and breastmilk alone becomes no longer sufficient. Furthermore, delaying the introduction of these foods may increase your baby's risk of developing allergies.

Benefits of Early Introduction of Allergenic Foods is Scientifically Proven

The Learning Early about Peanut Allergy (LEAP) trial was the first randomized trial to show the benefit of early introduction of a major food allergen. The trials revealed that early introduction of peanuts at 4 to 11 months of age were associated with a decreased risk of developing peanut allergy.

A follow up trial of the same participants, called LEAP-On, concluded that 4 years of peanut consumption was sufficient to induce tolerance to peanuts even if a person stopped eating peanuts for some time (i.e. a year).

Authors of the study also recommend prolonging exposure/consumption of peanuts (beyond 4 years) to maintain tolerance long-term; a strategy that has worked for people allergic to things like grass pollen and stinging insect venom.



1. SAFEST TIME FOR INTRODUCTION

If your child is not affected by any type of allergy or atopic disease, you can start at about the same time you introduce solid foods which should be around 4-6 months of age and provided your baby's neck control is strong and steady. Additionally, you should expose your baby to a wide variety of healthy foods of different texture, aroma and taste.

If your child has severe eczema and/or other food allergies, you can still introduce them to foods like peanuts (pureed) at about 6 months but only after they have been successfully fed other types of solid foods first. This is to ensure that they are developmentally ready.

2. START SMALL & START AT HOME

Introduce highly allergenic foods to your baby with the first taste being at home where it is easier to assess her reaction. Start by feeding them small bits of the food. If your baby shows no signs of allergic reaction, gradually increase the amount. You can introduce one new food every 3 to 5 days.

3. SINGLE-INGREDIENT FOODS FIRST

It really doesn't matter which foods you want to offer your baby first. But for babies with a family history of allergy and who has not had an allergic reaction to a food before, start with single ingredient foods (SIF) before moving on to introduce highly allergenic ones. Examples of SIF include rice, oat cereal, vegetables (sweet potato, potatoes and carrots), green vegetables, and fruits (apples, pears and bananas).



Peanut Puree Recipe

1. Add hot water or warm milk to 2 teaspoons of peanut butter and mix well.
2. Place a bit of the puree at the tip of a spoon and feed baby.



Choking Hazard!

Make sure to process solid foods to puree before serving it to your baby. The texture and shape of the food you give should be appropriate for her developmental age.

PROPERLY EVALUATE YOUR CHILD'S ALLERGY

A detailed assessment of allergic history and testing is advised before the introduction of highly allergenic foods if your child has:

- moderate-to-severe eczema.
- had an immediate allergic reaction to a food or breast milk.

Allergies cannot be self-diagnosed at home and should be done by an expert (i.e. paediatric allergist). Along with a patient's medical history, the results of the allergy test can confirm whether or not symptoms are indeed caused by allergies or not. It would also be able to identify the specific substances that trigger allergic reactions. If the diagnosis is positive, the most appropriate and effective treatment can then be determined. **PP**

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Know Your Probiotics

By **Associate Professor Dr Raja Affendi Raja Ali**, Consultant Physician and Gastroenterologist



Probiotics are the live microorganisms that live in your body, which provide you with many positive benefits to your health. Although bacteria can, and often do, cause diseases, probiotics are the 'good' bacteria that help keep your gut healthy. They are most prevalent in your gut, thus form the bulk of your gut microbiome.

Several studies have also shown various other benefits associated with probiotics, which have potentially been shown to help with allergies (e.g. skin conditions such as eczema or food allergies caused by lactose intolerance), preventing urinary tract infections, may prevent common colds and even influenza (as probiotics will boost your overall immunity), and even oral health (e.g. beneficial effects were observed on people with root caries).

Balancing Probiotics and Prebiotics

Maintaining a proper balance between the good and the bad bacteria of your gut microbiome is important, and the way to achieve it is by ensuring that your ratio of beneficial-to-bad bacteria in your gut is kept in equilibrium. Avoiding the imbalance between the good and the bad bacteria so called 'dysbiosis' is important to prevent disease. There are two basic things you will

need to address in order to achieve this. Firstly, ensure that you eat sufficient probiotics on a regular basis and lastly, ensure that you eat sufficient prebiotics daily. Combination of prebiotics and probiotics will lead to symbiotics that can potentially synergize the positive effects to our body.

Probiotic-rich foods typically come from fermented foods such as fermented milk products (e.g. cheese, yoghurt, cultured milk drinks), fermented soy products (e.g. tempeh, bean curd, miso, natto), and fermented vegetables (e.g. *kimchi*, *sauerkraut*, *acar*, Chinese *hum choy*).

Prebiotics are 'food' for the bacteria in your digestive system. Think of them as 'food' for the 'good' bacteria – just like you, they need to be nourished in order to flourish. Prebiotics can be found in high-fibre foods such as onions, garlic, banana, shallots, leeks, asparagus, and whole grains. While not all high-fibre foods are prebiotics, do not neglect them as they help bulk up your stool and promote regular bowel movement.

The many forms of probiotics

One of the most common forms of probiotics come from the *Lactobacillus* family which can be easily obtained from yoghurt and other fermented foods. They have been documented to help with both preventing and curing diarrhoea and, there is also evidence that it helps people who are not able to digest lactose.

Another common probiotic family is *Bifidobacterium*, which can also be found in several dairy products. Studies have shown that it can potentially ease symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and several other digestive conditions.

The basics of good health

Ensuring you eat sufficient prebiotics and probiotics is just one factor in the equation to maintaining a balanced and healthy gut microbiome. In order to ensure good digestive health, you should also maintain a healthy lifestyle and balanced diet, which are the very basics of good digestive health.

The key here is not to completely cut off your favourite food or drink from your diet, rather it is to consume in moderation! For instance, everyone loves their *nasi lemak*, but you would not be doing your body (or health) any favours by eating it for every meal.

The same is true for things that are good for you – take fibre for instance, an excessive intake of fibre may cause bloating or constipation, so be sure you stick to the experts' recommendations and not eat too much of it, thinking that more is better.

Do not neglect your sleep and exercise, adequate sleep is very important especially for growing children. When it comes to exercise, the Malaysian Dietary Guidelines recommends at least one hour of accumulated moderate-intensity activities daily, which can include activities such as playing outside (e.g. physical games that involve running, jumping), or you can encourage your child to go cycling or swimming. Other alternatives include sports such as futsal, football, badminton or even jazzercise!

So what are you waiting for, get yourself and your gut microbiome on the right track to a healthier you today! **PP**



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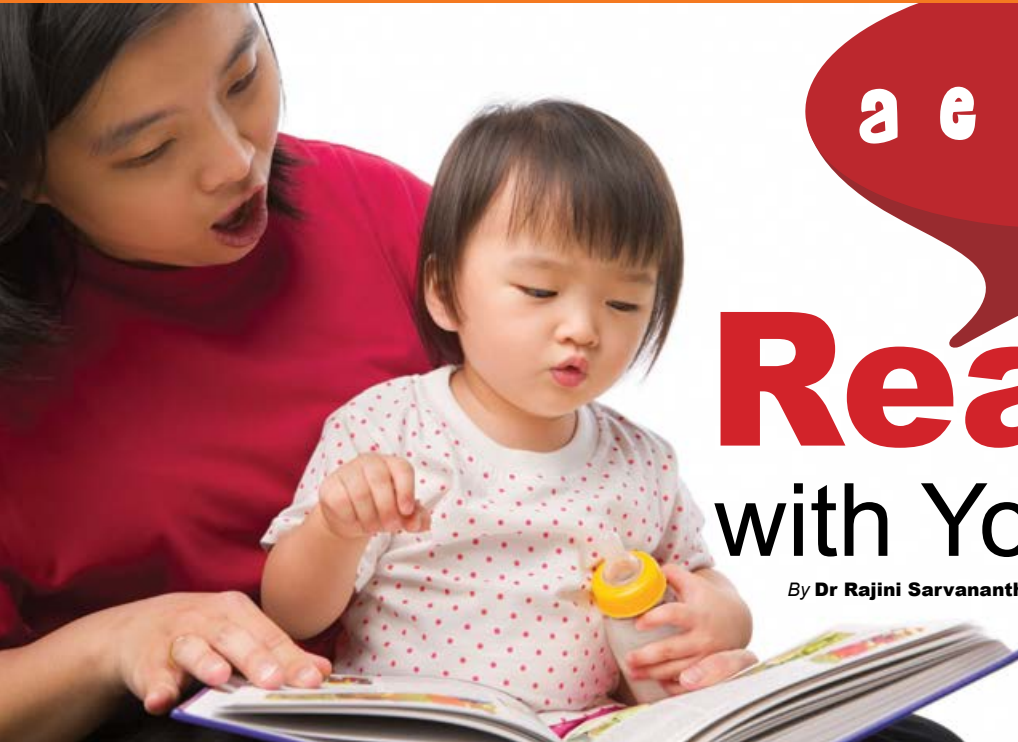


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Child Development

- Skills
- Problems
- Socio-emotional
- Physical Activity



Reading with Your Toddler

By **Dr Rajini Sarvananthan**, Consultant Developmental Paediatrician

If you want to give your toddler a social or educational advantage over his peers, a great way to do it is by giving him active exposure to language at an early age. You can achieve this by ensuring that you communicate with him as often as possible, and this includes talking and reading to him.

You can even start right from the moment of your baby's birth. Don't worry if he doesn't understand what you are reading, as the important thing here is for you to spend quality time with him, talking with him. Studies have shown that even premature babies who are exposed to reading in the neonatal intensive care unit have better language skills as toddlers.

There are numerous benefits to be gained from reading to your toddler, namely:

- Picking up a large vocabulary of words.
- Learning how to use them.
- Facilitate a better understanding of phonics (a system of learning to read by correlating sounds with symbols).
- Associating the letters (and later on words) with the words you use.
- Gradually learning the letters of the alphabet.

There are so many other benefits that can be associated with reading to your toddler. Firstly, it helps reinforce his cognitive ability – his vocabulary is growing in leaps and bounds at this time. Reading helps to 'feed' his curiosity and hunger for learning about the alphabet, colours, shapes, weather, animals, seasons, or just about anything under the sun. Quick Tip: Pick a book with plenty of pictures of things that he can look at and name.

Reading is also a great bonding experience as it allows you to spend quality time with your toddler. This helps build a strong connection between the both of you, especially if you make the effort to ensure your reading sessions are very interactive – this allows your toddler to connect with you and reinforces that special bond.

Did you know?

Reading out loud to your toddler can be a big help in helping him to make the transition, from being a baby to a toddler. For instance, hearing stories about other toddlers who are facing the same problem as he is, can help him to manage his fears or frustrations, e.g. he may worry about monsters under his bed; a story about how another toddler handles this problem may help alleviate his fears.

It's reading time!

Babies and toddlers normally love regularity as it makes them feel safe and comfortable. Try to ensure that your reading sessions happen at a similar time of day (daily if possible), for instance just before his naptime or bedtime.

If he is very active, try letting him sit on your lap or cuddle up with him. Most toddlers love being held closely as it makes them feel safe and comfy, thus enhancing your reading session with a happy and relaxed atmosphere.



Catch his attention

Make sure you have allocated the time solely for your toddler's reading session, so that means turning off the TV and leaving your smartphone out of reach.

Take your time when reading and be as expressive

as possible. Don't be afraid to clown around by using different voices or playacting the roles of each character.



You can also use hand or finger puppets as props while you read to him. Try to get him

to participate by reading, clapping or singing along with you. Have fun and replace some of the characters in the book with real life people, e.g. use your toddlers name in place of one of the characters.

Books with pictures are great as you can point them out and talk to him about them, e.g. ask him to name objects in illustrations or pictures. Before going to the next page, you can also ask him open-ended questions such as "What do you think the little boy is going to do with the box?" or "Tell me what you think will happen next?" This will encourage your toddler to think about the story you are reading and participate more actively in your reading sessions.

In addition to reading to him, you can also encourage his social and language skills by talking to him throughout the day. Other activities that help include singing to him, playing rhyming games, or even creating your own stories together.

Selecting a book

Always use age-appropriate books or material during your reading session with your toddler. You can start off with simple books for toddlers (most have typical titles such as "Baby's first words"). Let him select which book he wants read to him. Don't worry if he selects the same book every day for several weeks or even months as this is completely normal. Introduce new ones at the same time to show him that there is so much more to enjoy.

Books for toddlers normally have thick pages that are easily handled by toddlers whose hands are still not deft enough to handle a 'proper' book. In addition to this, 'baby' books are more durable so you can allow him to handle it himself without worrying that he might rip the pages out.

No limits to access

Your reading sessions should not be the only time that your toddler has access to books. Make sure that his books are easily accessible to him at all times by leaving them in places where he can reach, e.g. in a separate basket for books beside his toys or on low shelves near his bed. You should also make it a habit to keep some books with you, e.g. in the car or when taking him to see his doctor.

Remember, the objective in reading with your toddler is to bond with him, so limit the time he spends on any kind of gadgets with screens, e.g. TV, video games, smartphones, tablets, etc. The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) recommends a 'screen time' of less than two hours a day for children below two years of age. Don't fall into the trap of using a 'digital nanny' to replace you. **PP**

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Malaysian Paediatric Association

My Positive Teen

- Socio-emotional
- Conditions and Diseases

Building A Firewall Against Cyberbullying

By **Dr Nazeli Hamzah**, Consultant Paediatrician & Past President of the Malaysian Association for Adolescent Health



The advent of affordable computers and the easy-access to the internet has made us more dependent on them. Today, one does not even need a computer to access the net since other devices (e.g. tablets, smartphones, even printers!) are capable of doing so. Children below the age of 5 are introduced to computers and by the time they reach their teens, they have become somewhat of a 'tech expert'.

The Internet Is A Place Of Learning

The internet has become a crucial part of any teen's life because it is a gateway to a wealth of information. They can do their homework, research subjects, and refer to quality material for assignments, from the comfort of home.

The internet is also a great way for teens to socialise. Social media is widely used by teens (and indeed, adults) as a way to stay connected with friends and family anywhere, anytime. Your children do not know a world without the internet or social media, and they can't imagine being in a world without it.

The Dark Side Of The Net

With the advancement of technology also comes new and an increasing number of threats such as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying happens when someone uses the internet to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.

According to the Microsoft Global Youth Online Behaviour Survey (2012), Malaysia is ranked 17th highest in cyberbullying among the 25 countries surveyed. The study also reported that 33% of children aged between 8 and 17 years old have been subjected to some form of cyberbullying. Two years after the study, further research revealed that cyberbullying incidents among school age children in Malaysia were on the rise with 13-15 year olds being the most common targets.

Cyberbullies can be classmates, online acquaintances, and even anonymous users, but most cyberbullies do know their victims. Here are some examples of what cyberbullies might do:

- Send a mean or threatening email, instant message, or text message.
- Excluding someone from an instant messenger buddy list, or Whatsapp group or blocking their email for no reason.
- Tricking someone into revealing personal or embarrassing information and then distributing it to others.
- Hacking into someone's email or online account to send cruel or untrue messages while posing as that person.
- Creating websites to make fun of another person.
- Using websites to rate peers as prettiest, ugliest, etc.
- Incite hate for another person using information which is not true or made up and posting it online.

Keeping your child safe from online bullying

Parents and carers need to be aware that there is a good chance that children have been involved in cyberbullying in some way, either as a victim, perpetrator, or bystander. While it may be tempting to block them from using the internet altogether, it is not a realistic way to prevent cyberbullying. Instead:

- supervise their internet usage, set boundaries and teach them good online behaviour and etiquette. If a child breaks the rules, restrict internet access for an agreed period of time.
- use the privacy settings, parental controls and built in internet safety features provided.
- encourage your child to come forward if they are being bullied, know of someone who is being bullied or if they have knowledge of anyone being a bully.
- monitor your child's internet activity closely and ensure that you play a vital role in your child's life and get involved in your child's activities.
- teach them about treating others with respect and dignity whether on- or offline.

- equip yourself with knowledge about cyber safety, cyberbullying, etc., and make sure your teen also understands it as well.
- model appropriate online behaviour.
- if your child admits to being bullied, assess the situation, collect evidence, reassure your child and lodge a police report. If the bully is someone they know from school, also file a complaint with the school authorities.

Tell your teens to:

- Never give out personal information online for whatever reason.
- Talk about cyberbullying and let them know you are always there to listen and help if they need it.
- Never tell anyone their password and always log out of accounts or computers after use.
- If someone sends a mean or threatening message, don't respond. Save it or print it out and show it to you or another trusted adult.
- Do not open anonymous emails/spam or emails/messages from someone who has been bullying you.
- Don't post compromising pictures of themselves online.
- Think before posting anything online and always be polite online even when others are not.

Cyberbullying is a crime and a serious problem amongst teens and should not be taken lightly. Bullies can be convicted under the Computer Crimes Act, the Penal Code or the Juvenile Act, depending on the nature or severity of the case.

As parents, we cannot make the world a perfectly safe place for our children, but we should try our best to be available to them to provide counselling, comfort, and safety. Education and awareness are important to ensure that your children do not fall prey to the threat of cyberbullying. **PP**



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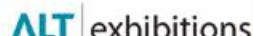
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