

Positive Parenting Malaysia

The Official Guide Series On Maternal, Child &
Family Care By The Malaysian Paediatric Association

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Make
New Year's
Resolutions
a Family Affair





Positive Parenting Malaysia

expert
collaborators &
management
committee

Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail

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



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and education
is vital in raising
healthy children.”



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Consultant Paediatrician



Dr Rajini Sarvananthan
Consultant Developmental Paediatrician



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and active living habits
must be inculcated
from young.”



Dr Tee E Siong
Nutritionist and President, NSM



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and principles.”



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child can learn.”



**Associate Professor
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Clinical Psychologist & Founding President,
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Pn Anisa Ahmad
President, PPBM



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resilience starts with
the family.”



Dato' Dr Andrew Mohanraj
Consultant Psychiatrist & President, MMHA



Malaysian Association of Kindergartens

“A quality preschool
education prepares children
for formal schooling and
lifelong learning.”



Ms Eveleen Ling
Chairman, PTM



DATUK DR ZULKIFLI ISMAIL

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Time to Look Ahead

The year 2019 is coming to a close. As a country, we faced many challenges and changes – from haze and toxic waste dumps to the implementation of a sugar tax and smoking ban. As an individual and part of a community, you would have experienced ups and downs as well.

The year-end is a good time for reflection and evaluation, not just for yourself, but for your family too. It is a time to look forward to the future and reassert your role as parent so you can continue to raise a strong and positive-minded next generation.

With that in mind, our *Feature* in this final issue of 2019 finds our experts discussing New Year's resolutions that families can adopt and achieve together. Having a resolution can be the starting point you need to improve your parenting skills, family relationships, as well as the diet and lifestyle. These small, yet meaningful, changes can open up new possibilities for your family.

In this issue, under the *Real Life, Real People* banner, we also talk to three working mothers about how having a newborn has affected their careers, and we learn about the challenges they faced upon returning to the workforce after maternity leave. Other topics broached in this issue include the effects of social media on eating habits, importance of introducing pneumococcal vaccine in the NIP, dangers of venous thromboembolism (VTE) in pregnancy and benefits of outdoor play for children.

It is our hope that parents will benefit from these articles. One of the simplest ways to equip yourself with up-to-date and relevant parenting skills in this digital age is to glean knowledge and information from credible sources. All our previous issues and articles can be accessed from our website at www.mypositiveparenting.org. Do browse through them to find something that interests you and will help you plan ahead for your family.

The articles contained in this magazine are not in any way intended as substitutes for medical attention. When in doubt, consult your doctor. Malaysian Paediatric Association, the experts and their respective organisations do not endorse any brands and are not responsible or liable for any advertisement or advertorial by sponsors.

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Make New Year's Resolutions a Family Affair

With **Dr Rajini Sarvananthan**, Consultant Developmental Paediatrician
Dr Tee E Siong, Nutritionist and President of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM)
Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail, Chairman of the Positive Parenting Programme

As the year 2019 draws to a close, the time has come to sit back and reflect on what has passed and what is to come. Common New Year's resolutions tend to focus on personal goals such as exercise, diets, decision to quit smoking or study harder. For a change, why not make New Year's resolutions together as a family instead?

The key to successfully achieving a family resolution is to make a commitment as one unit – this helps everyone to keep each other accountable. The intended goals should be something that all in the family can agree upon. Equally important is that the resolution should be something that is achievable.



Start by sitting down everyone in the family (yes, even the little children!) for a brainstorming session on some goals your family would like to work toward collectively. Remember to maintain an open mind and allow for all to contribute. This helps get everybody's "buy in", so all are committed and can work together to help make it a success!

In working towards a goal, start gradually at an appropriate pace and intensity that all in the family can realistically cope with. Do consider each other's schedules, ages and behavioural differences, but also set an ultimate target for a particular goal which your family wishes to achieve together. It's easier to start with something that's manageable, otherwise it may become too overwhelming and lead to a hasty "I give up!"

For example, if your intention is to spend more quality time playing outdoors with your child or children when you have never done it before, start with a weekly trip to the playground

for 15 minutes. Once everyone gets used to this routine, you can increase the number of times you go, how long you play there, or both.

Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail, Chairman of the Positive Parenting Programme, also suggests a healthy dose of encouragement: "Family unity and teamwork are important. Praise your child whenever he accomplishes his part and encourage him to follow through with the family resolutions agreed on throughout the year. Ask him to keep you accountable for your part as well!"

Starting new family traditions may take some time and effort, but stay committed and you will gradually achieve your goal of building a stronger parent-child bond. Parents can also benefit by getting in touch with their inner child as it is a great way to manage stress.

Dr Zulkifli says: "As parents, your child's health is not the only thing you should worry about. Her right to play is also critical,

so much so that it is included in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child! So other than ensuring that her safety, health, and nutritional needs are met, you should also spend quality time by playing, talking, and engaging in other meaningful interactions with her."

Don't worry if you haven't got a clue where to start when it comes to ideas for resolutions – *Positive Parenting* has put together a list to get your brain juices flowing ... just in case you need a little help!



Ideas for family bonding

The bond between a parent and a child is crucial as it provides a child with love and security. Don't delay – do everything you can to start building this bond from the moment your child is born. It will form the foundation upon which the strength and stability of her mental and emotional health are built on, later in life.

Consultant Developmental Paediatrician **Dr Rajini Sarvananthan** reveals: "This is particularly important for infants and toddlers as strong

emotional bonds often develop in the first few years of life. Many parents tend to underestimate the importance of child-led unstructured play. Play is ideal for spending quality time with children in the early years. Even parents of older children or adolescents can still use play as a means of engaging with their child."

To build a stronger parent-child bond, Dr Rajini suggests five family resolutions you can adopt:

1: Go out and play!

This is a great way to kill two birds with one stone – you can spend quality time with your family while doing healthy outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, or exploring natural places.

This ties in neatly with the recommendation to be more physically active. You can opt for daily 10-minute morning or evening family walks around your residential area, or mid-week walks in the park,

followed by weekend family sports sessions (volleyball, badminton). Later, you can slot in monthly picnics or day trips to nature attractions such as waterfalls, lakes and forest reserves.

2: Have a weekly game night!

"Playing games together is a great way to have fun as a family. It also aids in the development of your child's communication and problem solving skills," she says.

Playing together is a great family tradition to instil as it allows you to connect with each other. Some of the games you can consider include classic board games (like *Snakes and Ladders*, *Scrabble*, *Monopoly*), card games (e.g. *Bridge*, Memory games, *Uno*, *Stacko/Jenga*, charades) and even traditional games like congkak.

3: Let's volunteer!

Find a local community charity that everyone can participate in. Some examples include soup kitchens (e.g. Kechara, Kembara, PERTIWI), Generasi Gemilang, animal shelters (e.g. PAWS, SPCA), wildlife conservation efforts (e.g. WWF), or even school or community recycling programmes/events.

"Volunteering can have a profound impact on your children and help them understand how others live, a skill that can build their sense of empathy. Volunteering is a great shared activity for families, besides the added benefit of making new friends. Giving, compassion and commitment are qualities kids learn by example. Your child



will also find more chances to practise and develop her social skills," advises Dr Rajini.

Volunteering as a family helps you spend lots of quality time together working side by side, working or solving problems as a team, and gives you the chance to do something to address social or community issues (e.g. assisting the poor, helping helpless animals, etc). It brings the problems that may be remote or abstract and turns them into something real that your child can see and experience for herself. All of this will give her the chance to discover how giving can be fulfilling.

4: Let's acknowledge and appreciate each other!

Both are crucial aspects for a successful relationship with another person. It is an innate human need, and doing so with your child will create a more positive and encouraging family environment for her. If this is not something that you currently practice, then doing so will take a conscious effort.

Turning this into a family resolution means everyone in the family will become more mindful of each other and not slip into the habit of taking each other for granted, which could lead to arguments, frustration and resentment.

"As parents, we must be more observant of what our child does and be more proactive in providing her with positive acknowledgement for her actions, emotions, or feelings and to appreciate her efforts, even if she is doing something that she is supposed to. Doing so shows her that you are aware of what she's doing, and goes a long way toward validating her existence. Even a simple 'Thank you' can go a long way toward making her feel appreciated," she advises.

5: Practice digital restraint!

How common it is today to see families out together for dinner but engrossed in their phones instead of each other! If you are guilty of this, then it's perhaps time to consciously make a commitment to ditch this habit.

"Set aside specific gadget-free times and areas and adhere to this strictly. For instance, there should be no gadgets on the table during family mealtimes or during family outings such as family picnics. Remember, it is the quality time spent interacting as a family which fosters better communication. This will ultimately strengthen the family bond, and that is what we want," stresses Dr Rajini.



Ideas for better family health

Good nutrition is crucial as it is the foundation for good overall health. To achieve this, take a close look at the eating habits of the family. As parents, your own eating habits will greatly influence your child's eating habits, so it's vitally important to observe whether your (and by extension, your family's) eating habits are healthy or not.

According to President of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia **Dr Tee E Siong**: "Follow the concept of BMV, or balance, moderation and variety to practice healthy eating habits. There are several guides you can use to achieve healthy eating practices, such as the Malaysian Food Pyramid and the Malaysian Healthy Plate. These practical guides will be able to assist you in making healthier choices and in adopting healthy eating habits."



#QuarterQuarterHalf

To get your family on its way to better eating habits, Dr Tee suggests five family resolutions you can adopt:

1: Have family meals together!

Make it a point to have at least one daily family meal together. Ideally, it should be home cooked food, but if you are eating out or ordering from food deliveries, select dishes that are cooked in a healthier manner (e.g. steamed, braised, grilled, or stir-fried).

"Aim to meet the family's nutritional needs by having a balanced diet that comprises the right foods in the right amounts by using the guides mentioned earlier. This will supply your family with the necessary nutrients they need and will also help to support your child's proper growth and development," the nutritionist advises.

He urges families to follow the **principles of BMV** to be on the path towards healthy eating:

- **Balance** – meals should include food from the five major food groups
- **Moderation** – refers to serving sizes
- **Variety** – choose different food from each food group for a wider mix of nutrients

2: Don't skip breakfast!

It truly is the most important meal of the day. Make every effort to ensure that everyone in the family has their breakfast. Statistics show that 1-in-10 adults and 1-in-4 children skip breakfast. People who skip breakfast are at a higher risk of overweight or obesity. There is no excuse to skip breakfast as there are several simple ways to prepare reasonable breakfasts.

"Breakfast ingredients can be prepared the night before and be ready within minutes the next morning. Alternatively, you can stock your pantry with single-serving ready-to-eat/drink items such as wholegrain biscuits, cheese and UHT milk," suggests Dr Tee. "On some days when you are really pressed for time, you can prepare something real simple such as a slice of toast with a glass of milk, or a bowl of cereal with milk," he adds.

3: Stick to meal schedules!

Take your meals according to a fixed schedule and avoid deviating too much from it. You should also check with your child's caregiver or day-care to ensure that she eats her meals on time and doesn't skip them.

"Ideally, you should have no more than three main meals a day – breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You may include a small but healthy snack between meals, namely mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Avoid having heavy supper before bedtime – the additional calories will not be utilised by the body. If you consistently take heavy suppers, it will eventually lead to being overweight and eventually obesity," he warns.

4: Cook together as a family!

Instead of limiting family get-togethers to just eating as a family, why not cook as one? Younger kids can be in charge of easier duties such as washing vegetables and setting the table, while older kids can handle food preparation and simple cooking tasks. Be sure to monitor their progress until you are sure they can do it well.

"Cooking together is a great way to indirectly teach your child how to cook, which is an essential life skill once she moves away from home. You can even have a family cookout or barbecue every so often and take turns to do the cooking or grilling," suggests Dr Tee.

5: Go grocery shopping together!

Turn grocery shopping into a family adventure! Giving everyone a task to fulfil will turn a simple trip to the supermarket into a fun and educational affair that everyone looks forward to. You can even turn it into an opportunity to educate your child about things such as food choices, reading nutrition labels or food packaging.

"Be sure to plan ahead. When you know what you want to cook for your family, you can quickly plan and list out the food items. When selecting foods, be sure to check their condition and remember to check for expiry dates when selecting packaged foods. Select fresh produce as much as possible" he advises. **PP**



Have you got a family resolution idea that you want to share with us? Just drop us an email at parentcare@mypositiveparenting.org or visit our website at mypositiveparenting.org for more parenting articles.

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Positive Parenting Activities 2019

Malaysia



1. Panellist group picture (L-R): Datuk Dr Zulkifli, Dr Thiyagar, Dr Rajini, Dr Yen, Dr Alvin, Ms Bawany and Daphne.
2. Media dialogue in session

Media Dialogue

Positive Parenting organised a media dialogue at Shangri-La Hotel on 18 September 2019. Moderated by TV personality Daphne Iking, the event was well attended by various media and invited guests. This year's media dialogue with the topic **"Achieving Mental Wellness through Positive Parenting"** focused on combating depression, anxiety and addiction in children and teens.

The panellists this year were Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail (Chairman of the Positive Parenting Management Committee), Dr Rajini Sarvananthan

(Consultant Developmental Paediatrician), Dr Thiyagar Nadarajaw (Consultant Paediatrician & Adolescent Medicine Specialist), Dr Yen Teck Hoe (Consultant Psychiatrist), Assoc Prof Dr Alvin Ng Lai Oon (Clinical Psychologist), and Ms Bawany Chinapan (Registered Licensed Counsellor, psychotherapist and family therapist).

The panellists shared their expertise, opinions, and personal experiences with the audience. Core messages from the dialogue included the importance of parents setting a

good example for their children to follow, shifting the focus from getting good grades to learning skills and staying relevant, building up children's communication skills, and the importance of school-connectedness in mitigating high-risk behaviour such as smoking, drug use, alcohol consumption, and promiscuity.

Footage of the media dialogue is available on our Facebook page. Find out more on what our panellists had to say on this topic of concern.

PP Parenting Talk Series

Parenting talks this year were held at Baby Sensory Sunshineville, Kota Kemuning, with the theme **"Raising Future-Ready Children: Does over-protective parenting harm kids?"** Speakers Dr Cindy Chan, a developmental and behavioural paediatrician, spoke on creating conducive environment for children's learning and growth. This was followed by behavioural psychologist Mr Alexius Cheang, who spoke on parenting re-boot whereby



Dr Cindy and Mr Alexius at Sunshineville



Ms May at Setia Alam Club

parents need to tailor their parenting approaches to suit today's children. Psychologist Ms May Liu was invited to Setia Alam Club for their Parents' Day celebration, and shared on balancing EQ & IQ in children.

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Positive Parenting is also available digitally! E-version of PP Guide and past articles are available in our website. You can also subscribe to our email or follow our Facebook and Instagram pages for upcoming activities, read articles and snippets, share infographics and videos!

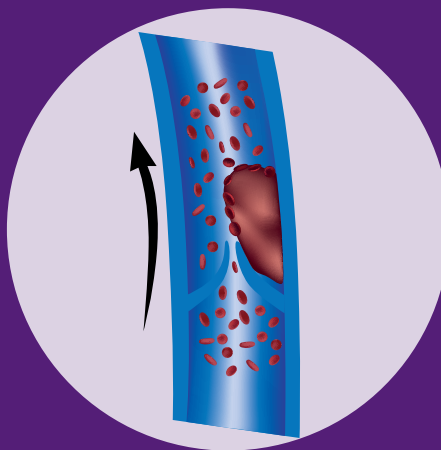


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Preventing VTE in Pregnancy

Venous thromboembolism (VTE) occurs when a blood clot forms in the vein, blocking blood flow in the area. Anyone can be inflicted with VTE, but some people are at a higher risk, including pregnant women.



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



According to the Department of Statistics, obstetric embolism, including VTE, remains the leading cause of maternal mortality in Malaysia. Between 1 in 500 and 1 in 2000 pregnancies are affected by VTE, more commonly during postpartum (six weeks after labour).

Percentage of maternal death in Malaysia due to obstetric embolism

| 2016 | 2017 |
|------------|------------|
| 23% | 26% |

Types of VTE

1. Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot that

forms in the deep vein, usually in the leg or pelvis, but can also develop in the arm. Symptoms include swelling, pain, warmth and redness of the skin, but 50% of cases show no symptoms. DVT is three times more common than pulmonary embolism during pregnancy.

2. Pulmonary embolism (PE) happens when a DVT clot breaks off and travels to the lungs. It is potentially **fatal** and causes breathing difficulties, chest pains, rapid or irregular heartbeat, coughing up blood, dizziness or fainting.

Pregnancy increases the risk of VTE by four or five times due to blood hypercoagulability

in pregnant women, a condition where blood clots more easily to minimise blood loss during childbirth. Other reasons include venous stasis (veins around the pelvis are compressed by the growing uterus) as well as blood vessel injury during delivery.

All pregnant women must be assessed for VTE risk factors in early pregnancy and after delivery. They will be categorised into high risk, intermediate risk or low risk groups, and advised to take appropriate preventive measures, including taking prescription prophylactic drugs, as well as asked to move around constantly and avoid dehydration.

Risk factors

Multiple factors increase VTE risk during pregnancy and postpartum. These include:

- Previous VTE
- Family history of VTE
- Age (higher risk as you age)
- Obesity
- Inherited clotting disorders
- Certain chronic diseases, e.g. heart/lung disease,
- cancer, inflammatory conditions, SLE, etc.
- Vein injury, e.g. due to major surgery, fractures or muscle injury
- Immobility, e.g. due to paralysis, prolonged confinement to bed, long-haul travel
- Increased oestrogen, e.g. due to birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy
- Caesarean section in labour

Treating VTE

Low molecular weight heparin (LMWH) is the recommended prophylactic and therapeutic medication for VTE in pregnancy. Other anticoagulants are less effective – e.g. unfiltered heparin (UFH) is linked with a higher risk of complications and fondaparinux is not recommended as it can cross the placenta. In severe cases, thrombolytic drugs can be used to dissolve the clot and surgery may be necessary for clot removal.

When diagnosed with VTE, LMWH treatment should be continued throughout pregnancy. However, it must stop once labour starts or 24 hours before planned delivery. Treatment should resume after delivery for six weeks, either with LMWH or warfarin (another type of medication). Both medications are safe for breastfeeding.

Compression stockings (special tight socks) may be recommended to help with blood flow and relieve pain and swelling. As a preventive measure, the sock should be worn on the affected leg for at least two years after having VTE. It also reduces the risk of post-thrombotic syndrome (PTS), a

possible VTE complication that causes pain, discoloration, scaling or ulcers on the affected area, which can lead to disability.



Local concerns

LMWH has been clinically proven as the most effective and safest anticoagulant treatment for pregnant women. However, the porcine origin of LMWH could be a concern among some Muslims in Malaysia. This may have affected the uptake of LMWH and is possibly one of the factors to the rising mortality rate of VTE.

Despite the origin, tests have shown that after extensive processes during production, no more porcine elements are traceable in LMWH. Many other Muslim countries have also allowed the use of LMWH due to its benefit and superiority to its alternative, especially for pregnant women. Muslim scholars agree that LMWH is allowed in a high risk VTE case as it can be regarded as a medical emergency and is required for life preservation.

This condition is one of the major risks that pregnant women have to face, and emphasises the need for optimal thromboprophylaxis (use of medication to prevent VTE) and treatment whenever indicated. **PP**

An educational collaboration with



Important Swimming Safety Measures for Children

By **Erika Peres**, Certified AustSwim Water Safety and Infants Teacher

While swimming can be fun for everyone, it's good advice for parents to take safety seriously before letting their children jump in for a splash.



When your child is in the pool enjoying a good swim, as a parent, it is of vital importance that you pay full attention to your child in the water.

I remember an incident I witnessed before, which serves as a cautionary tale to parents about the **dangers lurking in water when they do not pay attention**. As a swimming teacher, it is second nature for me to play the role of instructor, as well as a companion, to my kids in water. But this is not the case for everyone.

We were at a club house swimming pool, when my elder son pointed out that a girl in the pool needed help. The child, about four or five years old, was struggling at the other end of the pool.

My son, who has been trained, was the first one to reach her and pushed her to the wall so she could hold on to it for safety. But even in this chaos, the child's father was still occupied with his phone before he realised what was happening to his daughter. Who knows what could have happened if we were not there.

Prevention is better than cure

As a swimming teacher and parent, I always remind other parents about sticking to good safety measures in the pool. Do take the time to ensure your kids are swimming in a safe environment. Always keep in mind these pointers.

Assess the area

Before you take your children for a swim, it is extremely important to conduct a risk assessment of the pool.

● Check the depth of the pool.

Are you and your kids comfortable with this depth, and if something happens, would you and your kids be able to get help or exit easily?



● Any life guards around?

If you are not swimming with your child, make sure that the pool or the club house has a properly trained lifeguard on duty at all times.



I highly recommend that parents swim with their children as it is the best way to ensure your children's safety in the water. If you are unable to be in the pool with your child, make sure there are no interruptions or distractions outside the pool for you. You need to fully devote your time and attention to your children and keep an eye on them when they are in the water, whether or not there are lifeguards on duty.

Use the right equipment

Be careful with floats if you are allowing your child in the pool with no lifeguard or trainer around to supervise.

The use of a **neck float** is not a good idea and I would not recommend it. Toddlers' heads are typically heavy in relation to their bodies. They cannot easily turn to their side or lift themselves out of the water if the need arises. If a child turns over or is upside down, they won't be able to come back up on their own.

Arm floats are safe as children can freely move around with these floats, but this type of floats usually delay a child's swimming progress. Personally, I prefer **noodle floats**, although I believe there is still a certain amount of risk associated with them too.

Floats and all safety measures aside, I still believe if you take your child to swim, it is best to be in the pool with them as there is no substitute for direct supervision.

Be prepared

Finally, I would recommend that every parent go for a Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) course. CPR makes all the difference when it comes to adding the precious few seconds needed to save a person's life. Ask your paediatrician or local hospital to recommend a course if you are keen to learn this skill. Remember that **a child is at high risk of drowning even in small amounts of water, and that drowning can happen in seconds.**

Swimming with your children is not only great for bonding, but also the best way to keep them safe. Teaching them swimming provides them with a useful life skill and protects them against drowning.

So, get rid of your fears, practise safety measures and take time to enjoy water activities with your kids. You can use the exercises that were discussed in my previous article (in Positive Parenting Issue 3/2019 or go to mypositiveparenting.org) so you can enjoy teaching your kids the fine art of swimming.

PP



Erika is a Physical Education graduate with a specialisation in child and infant development through sport and aquatic activities. She is a certified AustSwim Water Safety and Infants Teacher and also holds an American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) Level 2 certification with over 10 years specialised experience in teaching babies and children.

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Maternity Matters

Juggling a career and family can be tough, especially for newly-christened working mums. But young Malaysian parents, caring employers and extended families are joining forces to create success stories.

It's meant to be such a special time in your life, when you and your partner decide to welcome a baby into the world, and embark on the journey of becoming a family together. However, the trip is often littered with discussions (sometimes arguments!) and life-changing decisions about careers, living arrangements and budgets.

Working women, in particular, have to weigh the consequences of having a baby against forging ahead in their careers. Pregnancies often force families into traditional gender roles where the husband concentrates more on paid work and the wife sacrifices her career to look after the children at home, ultimately putting women at a disadvantage when it comes to gender equality in the workplace.

Progressive parental leave policies, such as those in Scandinavian countries like Finland, Germany and Iceland,

can make the transition to parenthood more equitable, splitting the responsibilities between both parents regardless of gender. However, in Malaysia, women still bear the bulk of the burden of caring for the family, more so because the law was designed that way six decades ago and has yet to go through major reforms.

Under Maternity Protection Eligibility in the Employment Act 1955 in Malaysia, mums are eligible to 60 consecutive days of maternity leave, and each female employee is entitled to paid maternity leave for up to five children. Meanwhile, fathers in the private sector are not legally entitled to any paternity leave, while fathers in the public sector get seven days of paid paternity leave. The Human Resources Ministry earlier this year proposed amendments to the Employment Act suggesting the inclusion of three days of paid paternity leave for those in the private sector.

In June, *The Star Online* reported that Malaysia's female labour force participation was only at 55.6% – one of the lowest in South-East Asia – compared to 80.7% for that of men, as of 2018.

What's more is that many women feel unsupported when they eventually try to return to the workforce after their maternity leave expires. There usually isn't any formal structure of support for these women who have to adjust to their new role as "working mums". The onus is almost always on the mother to adjust her baby's feeding and sleeping schedules, and to figure out how to get to work and home on time (cook, clean and ferry the other children to school/daycare), as well as how they will continue breastfeeding (where and when to pump breast milk, how to store it) all while keeping up with their peers at work! That's no small feat! Those who are self-employed are not spared from these challenges.



Ooi See Bee with husband Dennis Sim and their beautiful children, Elendrianna (left pic) and Elijah (right pic)

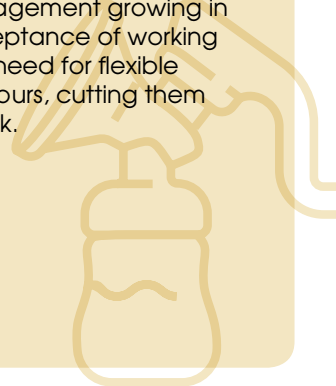
Ooi See Bee from Kuching, Sarawak, who runs an ice-cream food truck, says that breastfeeding was challenging once she resumed working after her confinement.

The mother of two says: "The challenge was making time to nurse my baby. My job required me to work outdoors, hence looking for a place to express

milk was really hard and storing it was an added challenge! Most times, I would do it in the car with all shades up and I carried my ice bag around with me."

Breast milk supply has been known to drop when one returns to the workforce, probably because the work environment is not as conducive as home.

Twenty years ago, many offices did not have a nursing station, so women were forced to sit in bathrooms or storerooms when they needed to express their milk. Pumping was also considered disruptive to work routines and would eat into one's lunch or break times, and not put you in the best light with your co-workers and bosses! However, things are changing for the better, and many young women find their peers and management growing in their acceptance of working mothers' need for flexible working hours, cutting them some slack.



Siti Hajar Abdul Rahman, 39, from Petaling Jaya, was working in Corporate Communications when she gave birth to her son, who is now four.

"Initially I took maternity leave but eventually I had to resign as I felt three months was not enough for me to be with my son and I wanted to breastfeed for the first six months. I was also not prepared to let someone else care for him. I ended up staying at home for six months before going back to work as a consultant, and this allowed me to work two days a week with flexible hours," Hajar shares.

"Six months was good for me. Enough time not only to get into a good routine but it gave me time and the ability to breastfeed exclusively. It

was also long enough that by the time I did decide to go back to work, I couldn't wait! My husband played a really important role in the initial months and even to this day. After I had my son, I actually suffered severe pelvic pains. I had to go for physiotherapy every other day for three months before I was healed. During that

time, my husband's presence helped tremendously to offload some of the burden of caring for a newborn while I underwent recovery."



Siti Hajar with her husband, Kushairi Shoib, and son, Qaiser Kamal



Journalist **Nasa Maria Entaban** from Petaling Jaya shares that her bosses were completely supportive of her new role in life as a mother.

"No one ever gave me grief about taking time off to take my kids for their vaccinations or to be with them when they were ill, and I was rarely assigned events after hours until my (first) child was older and we hired a live-in helper," says the 37-year-old who has two daughters, a six-year-old and an eight-month-old baby.

Nasa's workplace at Menara Star has a nursing mothers' room where mothers are able to comfortably pump in private and store milk in a safe and clean environment, and are allowed time to pump as many times a day as they need to.

Nasa adds, however, that her challenge was (and still is) figuring out when she can commit more time to build her career and take on more responsibility. She says: "Even with my hours being forgiving and having my weekends off, I still feel like I am stretched thin with trying to juggle raising children and thinking about my career, let alone my spousal duties!"

So, can employers do more to level the playing field for working moms, and new



Nasa and her husband Davin Fernandez, with their adorable daughters Dani Karina, 6 years, and Nuri Marlena, 7 months

mothers in particular? Nasa feels that there should be more understanding of the importance of a father's role in caring for children.

"Don't perpetuate the stereotype that parenting is 90% a woman's job. Give dads the chance to take their kids to the doctor and so on. If most of the parenting continues to be left to the mother, women will continue to be left behind in the workforce.

"For new mums, set up a daycare centre in the same building so that mothers can return to work, assured that their baby is just a floor or two away. More importantly if they are breastfeeding this will enable them to maintain their supply which often drops when breastfeeding mothers return to full time work. Or, offer subsidies for daycare centres near the workplace (some multinationals in KL offer this already). For working mums, make working from home an option. Don't punish parents for wanting to

raise the next generation of adults."

Indeed, even at companies that offer formal flexible work policies for mothers, employees are often too afraid to take advantage of the benefit for fear they may be earmarked as "unambitious" or "distracted" and placed in less-demanding, lower-paying positions. Meanwhile, those who decide to take a longer break from work may find it just as disconcerting. Letting go of a career, even temporarily, can create anxiety and many new mums feel a little bit lost with the sudden displacement of their careers.

However, if you have a sound foundation with your partner and decide from the get go how connected you want to be with your family, as well as your career, then you can set your priorities ahead of time, and you might be able to advance successfully as both mother and career woman. **PP**



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REFERENCES: 1. GOV.UK. Immunisations: babies up to 13 months of age. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/651692/Up_to_one_year_A5_booklet_hexa.pdf. Last accessed Nov 2017. 2. Ministry of Health Malaysia. Perubahan Jadual Imunisasi MMR. 2016. Available at http://www.infohat.gov.my/infohat/media/Poster/pd1/06_imunisasi_2016.pdf. Last accessed Nov 2017. 3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Multiple Vaccines and the Immune System. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccine/safety/concerns/multiple-vaccines-immunity.html>. Last accessed Nov 2017. 4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Combination Vaccines. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/nctd/conversations/downloads/6-in-1-combo-vac.pdf>. Last accessed Nov 2017. 5. WHO. Vaccine Safety Basics e-learning course. Combination Vaccines. Available at <http://vaccine-safety-training.org/combo-combination-vaccines.html>. Last accessed Nov 2017.



Return of VPDs

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

Have you heard about the increase in vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs)? Diseases that have come close to being stamped out have abruptly resurfaced and are now being reported in the news. These include diseases such as diphtheria, measles, pertussis and tetanus.

Stubborn refusal

Over the years, anti-vaccination sentiments have been on the rise. Some parents are refusing to vaccinate their children because of non-scientific reasons, including religious, personal or philosophical beliefs, and erroneous safety concerns. These have all been debunked numerous times, yet fear-mongers continue to beat this drum, thus perpetuating these myths.

This has led to measles reappearing in Albania, Czech Republic, Greece, the United Kingdom and in the United States, where it had previously been declared eradicated. Malaysia faces a similar situation with diseases that were on the verge of being eradicated making a firm comeback, including diphtheria, pertussis and measles. There have even been several reported deaths as a result of increasing refusal by parents to vaccinate their children.

Building herd immunity

Unvaccinated kids do not have any form of direct protection and remain fully vulnerable to infection if exposed. The only thing that protects them from these diseases is something called “**herd immunity**”, which works best only when **a large majority of the population is vaccinated (>95% for measles)**.

This helps to create a “buffer” that prevents the easy spread

of the disease, thus protecting other unvaccinated and/or vulnerable individuals such as those with weakened or compromised immune systems. The **high incidence of vaccine refusal weakens the effect of herd immunity which may cause it to become ineffective in preventing outbreaks from occurring.**

Poor reasons for vaccine refusal

The most common reason for parents refusing vaccinations for their children is because of the influence of other people or what they read online or in the media. These stories are often sensationalised to make them more “juicy” and often highlight rare or isolated incidences where a child suffers from an unforeseen side effect of a vaccine. They are then connected with other myths or reports about various problems such as vaccines containing dangerous chemicals (e.g. mercury, thimerosal) or causing brain damage or behavioural problems – none of which are true!

Other smaller fears that may lead to refusal (e.g. fear of needles, worry of catching the very disease vaccinated against, natural immunity is better, no need for it since the disease has been eliminated, etc) are also part of the chain of myths that stubbornly stay afloat.

It is ignorance that lies at the root of vaccine refusal, so **read up on the facts and ensure you get your information only from credible sources!** The “University of Google” is a poor choice as it is not easy to find credible sources of information unless you know where to look.

Don't take what you read or hear at face value, especially if it comes from someone who heard it from someone else! Make it a point to **verify the authenticity of any claim by checking with your healthcare provider or paediatrician.**



Prevailing myths

A now-debunked paper by Dr Andrew Wakefield that linked the MMR vaccine with autism led to the myth that ‘vaccines cause autism’. This is blatantly untrue! Vaccines do not cause autism in vaccinated children, nor are they a conspiracy against any race!

The halal status of vaccines should also not be an issue as the National Fatwa Council has issued a statement that vaccines provided by the government are all permissible. The same can be said for vaccines obtained from private hospitals – Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) issued a press statement on June 24, 2016 stating that it is permissible to receive vaccinations as they are meant for the purpose of preventing potentially fatal diseases, and even encourages parents to take the necessary steps to ensure the safety and health of their children.

Before you even think of refusing to vaccinate your child, consider the risks and complications of the disease first. If you still have any fears, worries, or doubts, please talk to your child's paediatrician or your healthcare provider and get the right information. Rest assured that vaccination works, and it has been proven to prevent diseases and potentially save lives. **PP**



An educational contribution by



Malaysian Paediatric Association

Pneumococcal Vaccine in the NIP: The Time is Now!

By **Dato' Dr Musa Mohd Nordin**, Consultant Paediatrician & Neonatologist

Pneumonia is the second leading cause of death after ischaemic heart disease in Malaysia. Globally, pneumococcal disease is the leading cause of vaccine-preventable deaths in children under five. One intervention can prevent these statistics from becoming worse: vaccination.



**Fact: 12.7% of
overall deaths in
Malaysia in 2017
were caused by
pneumonia.**

*- Department of Statistics
Malaysia*

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease occurs when the body is infected by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* or commonly known as pneumococcus. It can be divided into two forms: invasive and non-invasive disease. Invasive pneumococcal disease ranges from pneumonia (lung infection), meningitis (infection of the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord) to septicaemia (blood infection), while non-invasive forms include middle ear infection, sinusitis and throat infection.

Children under the age of two, senior citizens and people with chronic diseases have a higher risk of getting pneumococcal disease, exposing them to serious complications depending on the body part that is infected. This includes brain damage, decreased lung function, hearing loss, mental/physical disabilities and death.

At what cost?

Pneumococcal disease and its complications present **a significant burden to the patient and family**. Direct costs include the cost of consultation, medication, hospitalisation, diagnostic tests and surgical interventions, starting from pre-admission care until post-discharge follow-ups. Even if the patient is admitted to a public hospital, it only means that the costs are transferred to the government. Other indirect costs include long-term complications, transportation, accommodation, food, etc.

On top of that, parents also need to worry about taking

care of their child. They may need to take time off work, which affects productivity and career stability. Focusing on the sick child with a severe condition may also affect their relationship with other family members. These financial and emotional burdens can disrupt daily lives, causing huge stress on the family, especially among low-to-middle income groups.

To vaccinate or not?

The **addition of the pneumococcal vaccine in the National Immunisation Programme (NIP) will provide inclusive protection against pneumococcal disease**, especially for the group most at risk: the indigenous people and children living in rural areas, plantation estates and the interiors of Sabah and Sarawak.

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a priority to be included in routine childhood NIPs. PCV7 (covering 7 pneumococcus strains) was first available in Malaysia in 2005 as an optional vaccine. Later, PCV10 and PCV13 were also introduced in the private market.

There has been gradual progress since then. In 2014, an assessment by the Ministry of Health concluded that PCV is safe, effective and cost-effective, but budget constraints hindered its introduction into the NIP. In 2016, high risk groups started receiving PCV vaccination at the Ministry of Health's facilities, and in 2017, the Selangor state government included PCV under the *Peduli Sihat* initiative.

Yet, PCV remains excluded from NIP until present.

Is it feasible?

The biggest challenge to this goal is the economic factor. However, a number of studies looking into the feasibility of universal childhood PCV vaccination in Malaysia have shown it is actually cost-effective according to WHO recommended threshold, and beneficial in the long run.

Estimated cumulative benefits over five years:

- Decrease of deaths: 792
- Decrease of invasive pneumococcal disease: 1,920 cases
- Decrease of pneumonia: 58,677 cases
- Decrease of acute otitis media: 322,228 cases

Estimated net savings

in direct/indirect medical costs over five years:
RM 499 million

Global examples

In South Africa, the introduction of PCV in their NIP reduced 300% of invasive pneumococcal disease cases. In Taiwan, the shift from PCV7 to PCV13 in their NIP led to significant reduction of cases in the elderly and children as the majority of cases was caused by a serotype not covered by the former vaccine.

Although the initial investment will be significant, the number of lives that will be saved is

invaluable. Over time, it would translate into savings in direct and indirect medical costs linked to pneumococcal disease and improvement to the quality of life of the citizens, including reduction in education interruption and increase in productivity.

The good news – the government has announced in the 2020 Budget that a starting sum of RM60 million has been allocated to include pneumococcal vaccination into the NIP. This is the right step by the government and will be an important investment for the future generations and the growth of the nation. **PP**



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¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Global Pneumococcal Disease and Vaccines. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/pneumococcal/global.html>

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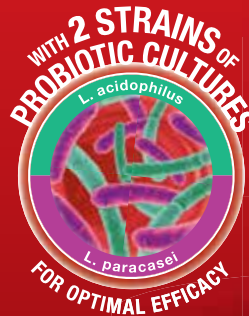
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* Reference: Mokhtar N, et al. (2018). Modulation of intestinal dysbiosis in patients with constipation-predominant irritable bowel syndrome using lactobacillus-containing cultured milk drink. Gut 2018;67:A70.

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Inside your Child's Gut

By **Prof Dr Raja Affendi Raja Ali**, Consultant Physician and Gastroenterologist

You have probably heard the terms gut health and digestive health – they both refer to the same thing and represent a crucial component of overall health.

Good digestive health means the proper functioning of the entire digestive system, which includes the gastrointestinal tract (GIT). The digestive system does so much more than just digesting and processing food, so keeping your digestive system healthy is important!

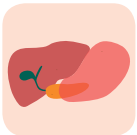
Gut helpers

A large collection of microorganisms that live in the gut is called gut microbiota. The good bacteria can be replenished by consuming probiotics, which are live bacteria that provide us with health benefits. A healthy gut microbiota can enhance our immune system, thus it is important to maintain a healthy gut microbiota balance of approximately 85% good bacteria and 15% bad bacteria.

The digestive system



- 1 Your child's digestive system comprises a collection of organs, starting with the mouth. Chewing helps 'break' food down physically and helps saturate it with saliva, which contains enzymes that aid the digestive process.



- 2 In the stomach, the swallowed food mixes with gastric juices and other enzymes that are released by the stomach, liver, pancreas and gallbladder. This helps to further break down food.



- 3 The food then enters the small intestine where water, proteins, carbohydrates and fats are absorbed. The small and large intestines populated by gut microbiota, play a crucial role in supporting digestion, they regulate immune functions and 'communicate' with the brain via the enteric nervous system (ENS). What's left of the food then enters the large intestine, where more water is absorbed by the body. Some of the microorganisms in the gut microbiota can release additional enzymes to break down the remaining nutrients such as carbohydrates.

The remaining waste products, including large pieces of food (which is why chewing properly is important!), are expelled out from the body as stool.

What is Enteric Nervous System?

The enteric nervous system (ENS) is a large collection of nerves or so-called neurons connected to the entire digestive system, and works together with it to digest food and extract the nutrients which are then distributed to where they are needed in the blood circulation system. Everything that is absorbed during the digestive process is used to provide your child's body with energy and the materials it needs for growth and repair.

There is also evidence that the state of the brain can affect the gut and vice-versa, e.g. feelings of stress can result in poor digestion or bloating, while frequently experiencing stomach discomfort or pain can cause an increase in feelings of anxiety or stress.

It's easy to care for his digestive health

Good digestive health is critical to avoid any disruption in the provision of nutrients and energy that your child's growing body needs. To enhance his digestive health, strengthen his immune system and minimise digestive problems such as constipation and diarrhoea. The basics of a healthy lifestyle are key – your child must eat healthy and nutritious food and get sufficient sleep. You should also try and encourage at least an hour of physical play and give him enough water to drink daily based on his activity level and the weather.



It is also important to maintain his gut microbiota balance. Replenish it regularly by feeding your child fermented foods that are rich in probiotics such as kimchi, tempeh, yoghurt and cultured-milk drinks.

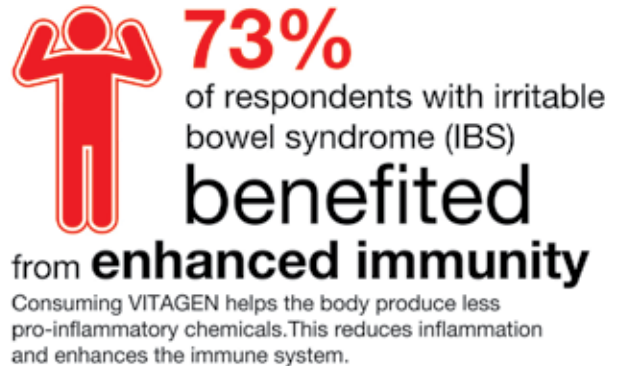
It would be wise to prioritise your child's digestive health. Remember that good digestive health is crucial for maintaining effective digestion of food, efficient absorption of nutrients, fewer digestive system problems and it also enhances the function of the immune system. **PP**



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Air Pollution and Health

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

Air pollution can happen both indoors and outdoors. The most common outdoor air pollution we encounter would be haze, while less common examples include airborne chemicals or gases.

Air quality

In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that 9 out of 10 people breathe polluted air with high levels of pollutants consisting of sulphates, nitrates and black carbon.

These pollutants can penetrate deep into the lungs and cardiovascular system, potentially causing breathing problems, chronic diseases, increased risk of hospitalisation and, in extreme cases, premature death.

The more common causes of air pollution we face regularly, haze and open burning, may contain high quantities of black carbon particles. The severity is determined based on the concentration of particulate matter (PM), i.e. the tiny particles that remain suspended in the air which affects our health. **Fine particles less than 2.5 µm in diameter (usually referred to as PM2.5) are more dangerous as they are easily absorbed in the blood.**

Tips to breathe easier

Keep track of the air quality around your house by checking the air pollutant index (API). You can look up on the Air Pollution Index of Malaysia (APIM) website. Keep newborns and toddlers indoors if the API is high (above 80).

Although the recent haze has passed, it is an annual occurrence. When it next occurs again, it will affect not just one's health but also disrupt

outdoor activities. Even schools have to be temporarily closed (although public examinations usually go on as normal!). So, what can parents do to prepare ahead? Here's how you can reduce the effects of poor air quality.

- **Check API levels.** Avoid strenuous outdoor activities if the API is at unhealthy levels (above 100) and do not go out at all if it is at very unhealthy or hazardous levels (above 200).



- **Keep doors/windows closed.** Buy and install door/windows seals to further "haze-proof" your home. This works best with an air purifier running. On days with no haze/air pollution, open the doors/windows to air the room.



- **Get a home air purifier.** This device helps keep the air in your home clear of air particulates. Check the purifier's specifications to ensure it can cope with the size of the room that it will be placed in. Replace the filter when necessary (most new models have displays to indicate it is time to change the filter).



- **Stay well hydrated.** Drink more water than the usual amount taken. Staying well hydrated helps dilute phlegm that accumulates in the nose/throat, thus making it easier to blow or cough it out.



- **Use a mask.** Preferably use N95 (or higher) masks. Buy the right size and wear it correctly to properly filter outside air. Disposable masks should be discarded after each use. Regular face or surgical masks (triple ply) may be used if N95 masks are not available but are less ideal as they do not filter out the majority of fine particles. Cloth masks are the worst alternative as they are not only unsuitable for this purpose, but are also a potential source of infection when it gets damp or wet.



Stay alert

Other than haze, there have been several recent cases of air (and water) pollution caused by illegal dumping of industrial waste/chemicals (e.g. the Sungai Kim Kim incidence in Johor) which affected the health of the surrounding population.

In terms of preventive steps, there isn't much one can do other than to always stay alert for signs of breathing difficulties or distress, and reduce exposure to such poor air quality as much

as possible. The best thing you can do is to remain vigilant and take active steps to ensure cleaner air for your child and family to breathe in. **PP**

N95 masks are designed for adults, but older children may be able to wear them. However, newborns, toddlers and younger kids will not benefit from using them so keep them indoors.

Do note that using the N95 mask requires more effort to draw breath, so it may not be suitable for the elderly, patients with chronic lung disease, heart disease or stroke, or women in the mid to late stages of pregnancy.



Examples of N95 masks.

An educational contribution by



Malaysian Paediatric Association



Social Media Can

Negatively Influence the Way We Eat

By **Dr Roseline Yap**, Nutritionist and Honorary Treasurer of Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM)

Do you know that social media can influence the way you eat and your food choices? Be a discerning consumer – do not be unduly influenced by food trends spread through social media.

In this digital age especially, our eating habits and decision making processes are to a large extent determined by numerous smartphone apps, television programmes and social media. Cases in point: the Instagram ritual of taking pictures of your food before actually eating it, people lining

up for hours to buy the latest must-have food or drink that is all the rage online, and even live-streaming their lavish dinners!

These are mainly driven by the chase for “likes” and comments – the instant gratification of virtual attention. Sure, the occasional food-hunt with friends may not be harmful, but we need to be cautious about how much influence social media has on our dietary intake and how **not** to be misguided.

Boba tea, spicy ramen, cheesy fried chicken, and many other food trends come and go. What do they all have in common? For one thing, they are made viral through the media, more often in social media such as Facebook and Instagram, and secondly, majority are unhealthy foods.

Though they may be much more tech-savvy, the younger generation is also easily swayed by these food trends as shown by the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2017 of Malaysia on adolescent health. Social media and television were reported as the main media sources affecting dietary pattern of adolescents in Primary 4 to Secondary 5.

How media affects dietary pattern of adolescents

Social media = **37.9%**

Television = **36.7%**

**Based on NHMS 2017*

Why the worry?

The Roman saying “We eat first with our eyes” points us to the issue at hand. Our sight is the first sense involved in the process of eating, before smell and taste. We like looking at colourful and beautifully decorated meals and social media has made it easier with a few taps on the screen. This urge to look at food is what scientists call “visual hunger”, which leads to “external eating”, where the sight or smell of food (external cues) arouses the craving to eat, despite the absence of physical hunger (internal cues). Even worse, external eating is linked to overeating and this may result in the rise of obesity.

Moreover, food trends are usually catered to indulge our senses. That is how we are persuaded into becoming repeat customers. The scary fact however is, the boba tea you love so much may contain up to 20 spoonfuls of sugar, the cheesy fried chicken is high in fat and calories, and your guilty pleasure, that deliciously spicy ramen, may upset your stomach and lead to a bad date with the toilet.



What can we do?

The first step is to realise the subconscious effect of media exposure to our consumption habits. Next: educate ourselves and take action!

Is there a healthy food trend?

Not all food trends are unhealthy. What is important is to practise healthy eating guidelines such as the principles of Balance-Moderation-Variety (BMV), Food Pyramid and Malaysian Healthy Plate. Look for nutritional information of these foods if available. Healthy trendy foods such as *poké* bowl (Hawaiian seafood salad), kombucha tea (fermented tea) and overnight oats are actually a good option.

Can we avoid the temptation?

Unrestrained temptation leads to unhealthy eating patterns such as overeating, consuming excessive sugar, salt, oil or fat, as well as unbalanced meals. This brings dire consequences such as obesity and non-communicable diseases (e.g. diabetes mellitus, heart diseases, and cancer). There is no harm in trying boba tea or other food trends, but do so in moderation by controlling your consumption (make it a once-a-month treat) or choosing healthier options (e.g. less sugar). Be rational and remember it is just a trend that will soon pass!

What are the alternatives?

Why not prepare your own healthier version? Use healthier cooking methods (e.g. grilling or baking instead of deep-frying fried chicken) and ingredients (more whole grains, vegetables, spices and herbs; less fat, oil, salt and sugar). This way you can also tailor the taste to your liking (e.g. spiciness level). You can also balance your meals by having more veggies and fruits for dinner, if lunch was burger and fries. If you must try the food at the restaurant itself, ask for less sugar, salt and sauce, or have smaller portions by sharing with family or friends.

How to use social media better?

Social media can also be a source of inspiration for healthy eating and active living. Fellow healthy eaters can share more ideas for your meals. Many credible experts also share their opinions on latest issues on social media. Among sites and pages you can follow are Positive Parenting, Nutrition Month Malaysia, Nutrition Division of Ministry of Health Malaysia, and World Health Organization.

Trends or passing fads can be fun to follow, but it is better to set a healthy trend for ourselves and our family to practise healthy eating. Remember: be cautious when using social media and do not get tricked into mindlessly following food trends! **PP**

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The Great Outdoors

By **Dr Raja Juanita Raja Lope**, Consultant Developmental and General Paediatrician

Children benefit greatly in terms of overall health, both physically and mentally, when they spend more time outdoors. When you spend at least two hours a week outdoors with your child, she is bound to reap the benefits!

Being in a natural environment allows for physical improvements (better motor fitness) and promotes creativity. A Scandinavian study found that children (aged 5-7 years) showed more versatile play styles and had better motor fitness after nine months of playing in a natural environment, compared with another group which did not.

Playing outdoors should be encouraged as an essential part of your child's healthy growth and development. This is also a good chance to let them appreciate nature and the great outdoors.

Playing Outdoors

Being physically active is a key contributor to good physical growth. Your child will benefit from all the



running, jumping, climbing, swimming and playing outdoors. Remember to further support her physical growth by providing her with good nutrition. Milk, for example, is an excellent source of nutrition as it contains most of the key nutrients that growing children need such as protein, calcium and Vitamin D. The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents recommend between two and three cups of milk daily.

Other benefits of spending time outdoors include:

- **Enhanced immunity.**

Spending time outdoors helps stimulate your child's immune system. This comes from improved physical health as well as exposure to a wider variety of microorganisms, which helps to prime the immune system.



- **Improved sensory, cognitive and social/emotional development.**

Research shows outdoor play contributes to improved mental wellbeing



in adulthood. The findings also link time spent playing outdoors with a better quality of life in urban children, and that playing with peers boosts social-emotional competence. When children play outdoors, they have more freedom to play.

- **Encourages creativity and imagination.**

Kids discover the world through play, and playing outdoors allows them to explore, invent, and transform their play styles. Let your child go with unstructured play where she dictates the rules, i.e.



let kids be kids and forget about milestones or meeting standards and expectations.

- **Strengthens family bonds.**

Playing outdoors is a great way for the family to get closer. You can do this by getting together for picnics, camping, hiking, biking, walking, or even visiting natural outdoor attractions. It's also a great time for you to share your thoughts, experiences, and childhood adventures with your child. Just pack sufficient gear for the activity of your choice, head out and most importantly, turn off your digital gadgets!

Spending time outdoors is the best way for our body to get vitamin D. Outdoor time is also linked with reducing myopia (near-sightedness) in kids, as they strain their eyes less when looking at faraway objects instead of staring at digital gadgets right in front of their faces.

Preparing for outdoor fun

Yes, the outdoors is great fun! It offers so many benefits, yet tends to be overlooked for many reasons. Put on old clothes so it won't matter if they get dirty, torn or caked in mud. Plan out activities that the family can have fun with and bond. Introduce your kids to the many wonders of nature such as the forest reserve, local waterfalls and lakes.

You will need to do a little planning ahead to maximise your child's experience with nature, such as:



Checking the weather forecast beforehand



Preparing a small first aid kit to take with you



Having a checklist of the gear/items needed



Checking for relevant information to prevent injury and taking the necessary steps (e.g. wearing proper footwear, following adult's instructions during outings, etc)

Getting your child to spend more time outdoors, instead of playing indoors or with digital gadgets should be your end goal. You will of course, need to make an extra effort to bring your kids to natural places and lead by example! The benefits will also extend to you – the change of pace will help you relax and unwind from the daily stresses at work. **PP**

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Let’s Talk about Love

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

Whether you call it puppy love or a school crush, you cannot stop your teen from developing romantic feelings towards another person. It is a phase that most parents and teens will have to go through at some point.

We all know about “the talk” – the one every parent has with their teenaged child about sex, love and relationships. But we often tend to focus on the physical aspect of these relationships so much so we forget the emotional side of things – how to love and to be loved. Some parents may not even realise that their teenage child is in a relationship! After all, many parents still view dating as negative and this can often lead to children being secretive about that part of their lives.

To manage this phase, parents need to be open-minded about dating, so that teens are comfortable to share their concerns, and parents are able to provide necessary guidance. A healthy relationship can be a positive experience in shaping a child’s identity and preparing him or her for future relationships as adults. Without adult guidance, teenagers may fall into harmful, or worse, abusive relationships that will adversely affect their well-being.

| Healthy Relationship | Unhealthy Relationship |
|--|--|
| Mutual respect Trust Honesty Compromise Identity Support Communication | Disrespect Hostility Dishonesty Control Dependence Intimidation Violence |

Parents' guide to teen dating

- **Going on a date:** In the beginning, group dating – where a group of boys and girls go out together – can be a safe and healthy way for your teen to start socialising. You can let her go on a solo date in her late teens as she becomes more mature, independent and responsible (e.g. when she respects your rules and knows not to get into trouble). Teach your son to treat his partner respectfully and know the boundaries, and your daughter how to protect herself and detect danger signs. Get to know their partner and circle of friends better. You can also impose appropriate rules according to community standards: reporting their situation hourly, returning home before a certain time, etc.
- **The love talk:** Love is a curious subject for teens and they need someone to direct their questions to. It is better for parents to take this role, instead of leaving it to outsiders or the Internet. Let your teen know she can approach you with any question – be open and do not judge. Talk about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships and ethics, or simply share your own experiences. This conversation can also be a starting point to talk about sexual education with your teen. You can initiate this even before he or she develops any romantic feelings.
- **Puppy love is love:** Most adolescent relationships do not last beyond school years, but do not view them

through a cynical lens. Avoid teasing your child about being in a relationship as it may embarrass him and he may avoid sharing his thoughts and feelings with you. The romantic feeling he has is as real as any other feeling he is experiencing and should not be belittled. This relationship is important in shaping his identity and character.

- **Digital dangers:** The advent of the smartphone and social media has made dealing with dating complicated. There are all kinds of dating apps available for download; beware that these apps also expose your teen to predators. It is also easier for teens to hide their relationships from parents with their own smartphone or laptop. Keep yourself updated with the latest apps or sites teens use, and encourage them to be open about their relationships.
- **Beware of violence:** Violence happens in different forms (emotional, physical or sexual) and to both genders. Even the act of stalking is considered harmful. Note any signs or changes of behaviour in your teen that may signal a harmful relationship, such as unexplained bruises, constant moodiness, drop in school performance, isolating oneself from family and friends and avoiding talking about his or her partner. Check up on their relationship regularly and approach them if you have any concerns.
- **Set a limit:** Love can be all-consuming and distract your child from other priorities.

When his performance in school declines and he no longer spends time with his other friends, it is time to limit his dates and remind him of his responsibilities.

Emotional fusion.

This occurs when a person forms an intense relationship with another person, and individual choices and autonomy are undermined for the sake of maintaining the bond. It happens in a relationship that seems too clingy or needy. There is little tolerance and high sensitivity in the relationship. A relationship with emotional fusion is unhealthy and will not last long. A healthy relationship requires two healthy people with a stable sense of identity.

Parents tend to be overprotective with their teens when it comes to dating. However, knowing whom your child is seeing is better than being in the dark about the relationship. Relationships need not be something negative in a teenager's life, but a stepping stone to enjoying a healthy, happy family life in their future. It is up to parents to start the ball rolling and engage in open discussions and sharing with their teens so that love and dating have a positive impact on their lives. **PP**

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