



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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## **CAP: Re-evaluate lifestyle amidst the Covid-19 pandemic**

The Consumers Association of Penang calls on Malaysians to re-evaluate and change their lifestyle and eating habits as the nation had one of the highest risk factors of developing complications from Covid-19. This is due to the high prevalence of non-communicable disease (NCD) such as diabetes.

The World Health Organisation had stated that patients with cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer are more vulnerable to becoming severely ill when they get Covid-19.

According to the Ministry of Health, Covid-19 patients with NCDs fare worse than others, with over 85% of those who died here having pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Diabetes is one of the main non-communicable diseases in Malaysia, affecting 3.9 million of the population. Another worrying factor is the increase the number of pre diabetes cases.

According to the 2019 National Health and Morbidity Survey, the number of pre diabetes cases has jumped from 8.8% in 2015 to 23.6% in 2019. The number represent almost a quarter of the population who has yet to become diabetic but will become so if nothing drastic is done.

According to Dr Foo Siew Hui, a consultant endocrinologist, pre diabetes refers to those with borderline diabetes which was potentially preventable with lifestyle changes. However, if left untreated, this group of people would eventually develop diabetes in the near future.

Diabetes is a metabolic disorder where the body does not produce insulin or does not use it efficiently — causing high blood sugar levels.

Dr Foo noted that it was worrying to see a significant portion of young Malaysians living with diabetes. 3.6 million Malaysians are living with diabetes – the highest number in Asia – while 6.1 million Malaysians have hypertension.

Malaysia is also the most obese nation in Asia, with about half of its over 32 million population being overweight or obese.

Diabetes is an important public health concern. Globally there is a rising trend in the prevalence of diabetes due to many factors such as population growth, aging, urbanisation and increasing prevalence of obesity and physical inactivity.

CAP calls on Malaysians to take the movement control order (MCO) period as an opportunity to review their diet, control their weight and increase physical activity.

The diabetes prevalence rate in Malaysia has risen much faster than expected, almost doubling in magnitude over the last decade. Diabetes has not only taken a toll on the resources, as it is a costly disease for the nation but also on the limbs and eyesight of its sufferers.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic there is an urgent need to curb the problem of the rising number of diabetics in the country which is now at an epidemic stage. In view of this the Consumers Association of Penang calls on the government to:

- > Ban vending machines in schools, hospitals and other public places
- > Educate Malaysians on the dangers of obesity and diabetes
- > Unhealthy foods that is high in fats, sugar, salt and additives should be discouraged by the introduction of taxes on such foods
- > Provide adequate recreational amenities in all residential areas.
- > Make it compulsory for food manufacturers to label the amount of sodium on the labels
- > Mandate clear labeling on fat content of all foods, including fast foods
- > Run education campaign for parents and children on the dangers of obesity and diabetes

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