



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP: Nip diabetes in the bud

November 14 is World Diabetes Day. On this occasion, the Consumers Association of Penang calls on the relevant authorities to take immediate steps to control the growing number of obese children in the country. Children in Malaysia have been labelled the fattest in the region, but their weight carries a greater burden than just their size.

The recent Movement Control Order (MCO) had worsened the situation as most children were unable to indulge in physical activity. Parents were complaining that their children were consuming more food than usual. The availability of food through online delivery services especially fast food which serve unhealthy foods also contributes to obesity. Fast foods which are high in fats and salt together with high-sugar soft drinks appeal to children. Continuous consumption of such foods increases their chances of getting diabetes, as obesity is linked to higher prevalence of diabetes.

Studies have showed that childhood obesity levels in Malaysia are among the highest in Asian countries. This is not surprising as overweight children and youngsters are a common sight at public places.

Children who are overweight or obese face an increased risk of developing serious health conditions like type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol – all considered being exclusively adult diseases in the past.

Overweight and obese children are also more likely to turn into overweight adults, and obesity in adulthood is more severe, in terms of consequences. Children who are obese are also more likely to have impaired glucose tolerance, decreased insulin resistance, suffer liver or gall bladder disease, gastro-esophageal reflux (GERD), sleep apnoea, breathing difficulties like asthma, joint problems, and musculo-skeletal problems.

According to the Malaysian Mental Health Association, in addition to medical problems, overweight children may also suffer psychological problems such as low self-esteem that stems from being teased or bullied by peers, develop unhealthy dieting habits and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, be more prone to depression or are at risk for substance abuse.

According to experts, the “fat phenomenon” in our country can be attributed to a combination of poor eating habits, a diet high in calories, and a decline in physical activity, resulting in more caloric intake than is required by the body.

In addition, more meals eaten away from home, fewer family meals, and greater portion sizes may also have contributed to childhood overweight.

Furthermore, the boom in mobile entertainment devices and too much screen time has also contributed

to children's sedentary lifestyles. Children are now less physically active as children's entertainment has changed from physical or outdoor activities to indoor video games and television. To further compound this problem, there is a lack of safe or conducive outdoor play areas, especially in urban areas.

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic conditions to affect children. It can strike children of any age even toddlers and babies. If not detected early in a child, diabetes can be fatal or it may cause serious brain damage. Yet diabetes in a child is often completely overlooked it is often misdiagnosed as the flu or not diagnosed at all.

The WHO estimated that more than 200 million people worldwide are living with diabetes and each year another seven million develop it.

The diabetes prevalence rate in Malaysia has risen much faster than expected, almost doubling in magnitude over the last decade. Diabetes does not only take a toll on the country's resources, but also on the limbs (amputation), eyesight (blindness), kidney (failure), heart (failure) and nerve (damage) of its sufferers.

Surveys have shown that for every two known diabetics, there is at least one more that is undiagnosed and untreated until irreversible complications set in. Worse still, Type 2 diabetes is no longer seen as a disease of middle or old age - children as young as 10 years old suffering from diabetes (both Type 1 and Type 2) are not uncommon nowadays.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), globally, obesity and overweight has more than doubled since 1980

As November 14 is World Diabetes Day, CAP would like to call on the relevant authorities to take immediate action to address the growing obesity problem among the young as obesity will lead to diabetes in their adulthood. These measures should include:

- 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 campaigns for parents and children on the dangers of obesity and diabetes

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