



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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Unhealthy Living Makes Malaysia No. 1 in Diabetes Prevalence in ASEAN

Today November 14 is World Diabetes Day, and on this occasion, the Consumers Association of Penang calls on consumers to practice healthy lifestyle to reduce the risk of diabetes

Currently it is estimated that there are 3.5 million diabetics in Malaysia. Our diabetes prevalence is the highest in ASEAN. Diabetes prevalence in Malaysia was only 1-2% in 1960. It has skyrocketed to 17.5% this year.

As obesity is a major contributing factor to diabetes, the high incidence of diabetics in the country is not surprising, as Malaysia is the most obese country in Asia with an overweight and obesity rate of more than 45.3 per cent. According to the British medical journal, The Lancet, 49 per cent of women and 44 per cent of men in this country were found to be overweight or obese.

Excessive body weight, serves as a predisposing factor for diabetes mellitus. Due to extra amount of fat in the body, the insulin does not function properly in the body. Normally, the main function of insulin is to allow the sugar present in the blood to enter the muscle and tissue cells. But due to increased fat in the body, the muscle and tissue cells become resistant to insulin, leading to high blood sugar level in blood (hyperglycemia) and finally diabetes.

Diabetes in Malaysia is expected to continue to climb at an increased rate due to our unhealthy lifestyle.

The bad lifestyle of Malaysians, are linked to high diabetes prevalence in the following way:

- Our per capita consumption of meat is 48 kilograms compared to 35 kilograms in Japan and Korea and only 24 kilograms in Thailand.

According to researchers from Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) a daily serving of red meat no larger than a deck of cards increased the risk of adult-onset diabetes by 19 percent. Processed red meat proved much worse: a daily serving half that size — one hot dog or two slices of bacon, for example—was associated with a 51 percent increase in risk.

- We consume 26 teaspoons of sugar daily, making us the eighth highest sugar users in the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its campaign against obesity had recommended a sugar consumption limit of 5 teaspoonsful daily.

Results of a large epidemiological study suggest that sugar may also have a direct link to diabetes. Researchers examined data on sugar availability and diabetes rates from 175 countries over the

past decade. They found that increased sugar in a population's food supply was linked to higher diabetes rates, independent of obesity rates.

- Malaysians are not getting enough sleep for good health. According to a regional survey Malaysians get only 6.4 hours of sleep on average. This leads to a sleep gap of 1.6 hours short of the recommended 8 hours of sleep. Mobile devices and spending time online is one of the leading causes of this sleep deprivation.

According to Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorders Center in Hennepin County the body's reaction to sleep loss can resemble insulin resistance which is a precursor to diabetes.

- We are also addicted to internet which is a new threat to healthy living. According to a survey, 81% of the respondents surveyed say that online activities are preventing them from getting enough sleep and physical activities

There is evidence that physical activity is an important part of the daily maintenance of glucose levels. Even in the short term, reducing daily activity and ceasing regular exercise causes acute changes in the body associated with diabetes that can occur before weight gain and the development of obesity.

Over time, diabetes can seriously affect every major organ system in the body, causing heart attacks, strokes, nerve damage, kidney failure, blindness, impotence and infections that can lead to amputations.

Every year on this date the Ministry of Health launches a campaign to create awareness on the effect of diabetes. In spite of this, the prevalence of diabetes mellitus in Malaysia, especially that of Type 2, has increased to epidemic proportions and continue to grow.

The alarming increase in Malaysia's prevalence of diabetes needs strong measures by the Government to stem this epidemic.

The Consumers Association of Penang urges the Ministry of Health to:

- 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.
- Stop issuing 24 hours licenses to eating outlets
- Stop night shifts in factories
- Ban vending machines in schools, hospitals and other public places
- Mandate clear labeling like traffic light system on sugar and fat content of all foods, including fast foods
- Run education campaigns for parents and children on the dangers of obesity and diabetes
- Stop entertainment outlets from operating after midnight

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