

Health Ministry mulls grades for food nutrition

IN response to alarming findings on the nutritional habits of Malaysians, the Health Ministry is stepping up efforts to promote healthy eating, including working with food influencers and introducing new policies to encourage healthier choices.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said social media influencers, or key opinion leaders, can play a crucial role in shaping public behaviour, and the ministry intends to leverage their influence to spread awareness of healthy lifestyles.

"We want our influencers to uphold the most important agenda, which is to promote healthy eating and lifestyles," he told reporters yesterday, after moderating a dialogue on the National Health and Morbidity Survey

(Nutrition) 2024 findings.

The report revealed serious deficiencies in the population's dietary habits.

Only 12.8% of adolescents and 17.1% of adults meet the minimum recommended intake of fruits and vegetables, while dairy consumption is extremely low, at just 2.9% among adolescents and a mere 0.7% among adults.

At the same time, sugar consumption is excessive, with 63.1% of adolescents and 47.0% of adults exceeding the recommended intake, mainly due to sweetened beverages.

Fat consumption also surpasses the advised 30% of daily energy intake across all age groups, and 75.9% of adults consume more salt than recommended.

Dzulkefly said the government



Health blitz: Dzulkefly posing for a group photo after attending the Nutrition event at the parliament building in Kuala Lumpur. — Bernama

will begin with policies focused on food literacy and nutrition awareness and highlighted the importance of addressing supply-side issues to make healthy food more accessible.

"Ultimately, it's about ensuring that food suppliers, particularly manufacturers, help promote the

idea that healthy food does not need to be expensive," he said.

Dzulkefly also revealed that the ministry is considering the introduction of a nutri-grade system, which would classify food items by nutritional value.

"When we introduce nutri-grade, we will know the category

of food, from A, the best, to B, and so on, including those that cannot be advertised at all," he said.

He also suggested that products deemed unhealthy could be placed in special sections of supermarkets, similar to how non-halal items are currently separated, to increase consumer awareness.

HEALTHIER CHOICES

Ministry to introduce food grading system

KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry will soon introduce a nutrient rating system to classify food based on its health value.

This is to raise awareness about healthy eating.

Its minister, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, said yesterday that food would be categorised into Grade A for healthy food and Grade B for unhealthy food, which will not be allowed to be advertised.

"In that same spirit, unhealthy food will be labelled as 'unhealthy'.

"This is important so the public understands that such food should not even be touched, let alone consumed."

He said this after attending a

dialogue on healthy eating in Parliament.

Dzulkefly added that the ministry would engage with social media influencers so they could play a role in educating the public about healthy eating habits.

He said influencers could shape public behaviour either positively or negatively.

To encourage healthier food choices, the ministry, said it was looking into more specific measures, including recommending that government events serve more vegetables, legumes and milk.

The ministry wants to discourage the serving of sweetened beverages at government functions.

KKM laksana pengelasan gred makanan

KUALA LUMPUR - Pengelasan nutrisi makanan atau Nutri-Grade di bawah inisiatif Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) akan dilaksanakan dalam masa terdekat, kata Menteri, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

Beliau berkata, Nutri-Grade antaranya akan digunakan bagi mengkategorikan produk makanan yang dijual di pasar raya supaya mudah difahami pengguna selain pelaksanaannya bertujuan meningkatkan literasi pemakanan sihat dalam kalangan rakyat.

"Apabila kita perkenalkan Nutri-Grade itu, kita akan dapati bahawa kategori makanan bermula dari gred A iaitu yang terbaik dan kemudian gred D yang langsung tidak boleh diiklankan.

"Kita akan kategorikan yang tidak sihat itu gred D iaitu (kandungan makanan) tidak sihat supaya orang tahu, kalau boleh elakkan makanan itu," katanya selepas sesi makan tengah hari Pemakanan Sihat,

Tanggungjawab Bersama dan pelancaran Dapatan Tinjauan Kebangsaan Kesihatan dan Morbiditi (NHMS) 2024 (Pemakanan) di Dewan Bankuet, Parlimen pada Selasa.

Dr Dzulkefly berkata, pendekatan berkenaan perlu dilaksanakan susulan hasil dapatan NHMS yang menunjukkan masih berlaku kekurangan nutrisi makanan dalam kalangan masyarakat.

"Cabaran masih lagi menekan terhadap tuntutan kami sebagai pengurus kesihatan untuk memastikan amalan dan praktis pemakanan sihat terus diangkat antaranya berkaitan beban berganda malnutrisi khususnya dalam kalangan remaja dan kanak-kanak," katanya.

Beliau berkata, KKM juga terbuka mengadakan libat urus bersama pempengaruh media sosial bagi membantu Kementerian merealisasikan agenda pemakanan sihat di negara ini. - *Bernama*



Dr Dzulkefly (tiga dari kiri) selepas menghadiri Majlis Pemakanan Sihat, Tanggungjawab Bersama Dapatan NHMS 2024 di Bangunan Parlimen pada Selasa.

Pembedahan plastik bukan semata-mata mengenai kecantikan

Bangi: "Bila sebut pembedahan plastik, masih ada yang memandang serong, kononnya ia mengubah ciptaan Tuhan."

"Tapi, hakikatnya bidang ini jauh lebih luas dan bermakna. Jujurnya saya seronok kerana dapat bantu ramai pesakit melalui pembedahan rekonstruktif iaitu membaiki bahagian tubuh yang cedera atau terjejas akibat penyakit."

Demikian kata Dr Arifuddin Ishak, 41, ketika berkongsi pengalamannya yang sudah tujuh tahun berkhidmat sebagai pakar bedah plastik dan kini berkhidmat di Hospital Tengku Ampuan Afzan (HTAA), Kuantan, Pahang.

Dr Arifuddin berkata, minat terhadap pembedahan plastik mula berputik sejak menjalani latihan perubatan (*housemanship*) selepas didedahkan dengan kes berkaitan rekonstruksi wajah dan anggota badan.

Bertitik tolak daripada situ, beliau 'jatuh cinta' dengan bidang itu hingga

menjadikan beliau pakar dan mengetuai pelbagai jenis pembedahan hari ini.

"Di hospital kerajaan, tumpuan kami lebih kepada pembedahan rekonstruktif, bukan estetik. Prosedur estetik biasanya dibuat di pusat perubatan swasta."

"Itu bezanya dan antara kes paling kerap saya kendalikan termasuk kecederaan muka atau anggota badan akibat kemalangan jalan raya, kes bibir sumbing dan lelangit (*kleft*), serta parut yang mengganggu fungsi atau penampilan," katanya ketika ditemui Harian Metro.

Bercerita lanjut, Dr Arifuddin mengakui bukan semua pembedahan dikenaldikannya berakhir dengan senyuman.

Katanya, antara pengalaman paling mencabar baginya ketika mengendalikan pembedahan ke atas seorang lelaki yang menghidap barah kulit pada wajah, tiga tahun lalu.

"Saya terpaksa buang hampir keseluruhan kulit



DR Arifuddin berpengalaman tujuh tahun sebagai pakar bedah plastik.

wajah yang terbabit dan gantikan dengan kulit dari paha.

"Pembedahan itu panjang dan rumit mengambil masa dalam 17 hingga 18 jam tapi berjaya. Sayangnya, pesakit kemudian dijangkiti kuman di paru-paru," katanya.

Menurutnya, risiko seperti jangkitan dan pendarahan sentiasa ada, na-

mun kepuasan sebenar adalah apabila pasukannya berjaya menyempurnakan pembedahan dan memberi sinar baru kepada pesakit.

Beliau berkata, cabaran dalam bidang diceburi bukan sekadar teknikal, namun daripada segi emosi dan tanggungjawab besar yang perlu digalas oleh beliau dan pasukannya.

"Kalau pelan A tak men-

jadi, kami kena teruskan dengan pelan B kerana misi utama kami adalah untuk bantu pesakit."

Ia termasuk mereka yang menjalani pembedahan rekonstruksi selepas pembuangan ketumbuhan besar, pembetulan komplikasi selepas pembedahan terdahulu atau pembentukan semula kemaluan akibat kecacatan atau trau-

ma," katanya.

Dr Arifuddin berkata, setiap pembedahan perlu dinilai dengan teliti terlebih dahulu.

Jika risiko terlalu tinggi, beliau tidak akan meneruskan prosedur bagi mengelakkan komplikasi yang boleh membahayakan nyawa pesakit.

"Saya berharap orang ramai akan lebih memahami bahawa pembedahan plastik bukan semata-mata mengenai kecantikan."

"Ramai pesakit datang bukan untuk kelihatan sempurna, tapi merasa selesa dalam tubuh sendiri, menjalani hidup dengan keyakinan dan kembali berfungsi seperti insan lain."

"Bagi saya, setiap pesakit bukan hanya satu kes di atas meja bedah kerana mereka datang dengan luka yang tak selalu kelihatan, membawa harapan, kisah perjuangan dan semangat untuk bangkit semula. Saya hanya saksi kecil dalam perjalanan besar mereka," katanya.

Belgian region grapples with forever chemicals scandal



A nurse holds a blood sample for a study of PFAS pollutant levels in Braine-le-Chateau, south of Brussels.
PICTURE CREDIT: NICOLAS TUCAT/AFP

A WATER contamination scandal has gripped a leafy corner of southern Belgium, causing anxious residents to queue up for blood tests to confirm potential exposure to so-called forever chemicals.

On an early summer afternoon about a dozen people waited to get their samples taken at a municipal building in Braine-le-Chateau, a picturesque town in the French-speaking Wallonia region.

"Initially local authorities told us that the measurements were reassuring, but in reality, they didn't have any and were simply trying to keep people calm as best they could," Douglas, a 35-year-old consultant who preferred only to give his first name, told AFP.

"This kind of game has to stop," he said, adding that he hoped the blood-sampling campaign launched in June



would help shed light on the situation.

Anger in the region first erupted in 2023, when an investigation by local broadcaster RTBF revealed the authorities had ignored longstanding warnings about high levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), often called forever chemicals.

It emerged that the US military, which has an airbase in the small city of Chieffres, had warned the local water company in 2017 about high PFAS levels in drinking water, following an incident involving firefighting foam.

The US base advised its personnel to drink bottled water. However, the locals were left in the dark for years, even after the regional government was told of the issue in 2018.

PFAS are a family of synthetic chemicals that take an extremely long

time to break down. Chronic exposure to even low levels of the chemicals has been linked to liver damage, high cholesterol, reduced immune responses, low birth weights and several kinds of cancer.

A group of more than 10,000 human-made chemicals that repel heat, water and oil, PFAS are used in nonstick pans, stain-proof carpets, and other products. But their use is increasingly being restricted across the world due to adverse health effects.

In June an Italian court sentenced executives at a chemical plant to jail terms of up to 17 years for polluting water used by hundreds of thousands of people with the chemicals.

'PUTTING OUT FIRES'

Water samples in Braine-le-Chateau last year revealed levels five to six times higher than a safety standard of 4 nanograms/litre (ng/L) for four PFAS recently agreed by Belgian authorities.

The exact source of the pollu-

Telling people not to eat their home-grown eggs and vegetables, setting standards for sewage sludge... for now I'm just putting out fires.

Yves Coppieters

tion has not yet been confirmed and a judicial investigation is underway. Authorities have since ordered water distribution firms to install activated carbon filters — a move they say has contained the issue.

Large-scale blood testing was carried out in Chieffres in early 2024 — and later extended to nearby areas.

Authorities said almost 1,300 people across about 10 municipalities had their blood samples taken to confirm exposure to the chemicals in recent weeks, as part of a fresh campaign launched in June.

The results, which could lead to new health recommendations, are expected later this year.

Wallonia's government, which took office last summer, has also decided to bring forward to 2025 new European Union rules requiring that drinking water must not exceed a total of 100 ng/L for 20 substances in the PFAS family.

"We have taken radical measures and all our distributors are now complying with this standard," Yves Coppieters, the regional minister for health and the environment, told AFP.

Nevertheless he acknowledged that "the population is very concerned", adding that without clarity on the source of the pollution, it might take decades to resolve the issue.

"Telling people not to eat their home-grown eggs and vegetables, setting standards for sewage sludge... for now I'm just putting out fires," said Coppieters, who favours a ban on all products containing PFAS.

Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have submitted a joint proposal for the EU to ban the production, sale, and use of almost all forever chemicals. And the European Commission has said it is looking to ban PFAS in everyday consumer products.



A woman arrives to have her blood sample taken for a study of PFAS pollutant levels.



A nurse takes a man's blood sample for a study of PFAS pollutant levels. Contamination of drinking water in several areas of Wallonia has seen the mobilisation of scientists and public authorities.



Parents often notice something amiss during routine activities like bathing their child or changing diapers. PICTURE CREDIT: FREEPIK

Undescended testes poses risks to baby boys

ONE of the most common genital problems affecting newborn baby boys is a condition called undescended testes.

It is often overlooked or misunderstood by parents, but if left untreated, it can lead to long-term complications, including fertility problems and a higher risk of testicular cancer later in life.

It happens when one or both testicles have not moved into the scrotum as expected and is commonly found in premature babies.

Other risk factors include being born at term but with a lower birth weight compared to the general population, or having a family history of the condition.

Environmental factors may also play a role, says Prince Court Medical Centre consultant urologist and robotic surgeon Dr Roger Anthony Idi.

For example, maternal smoking or alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been associated with a higher risk.

There are different types of undescended testes, he explains.

In some cases, the testis has not yet

descended into the scrotum but can still be felt during a physical examination — this is known as a palpable undescended testis.

In other cases, it is non-palpable, meaning it cannot be felt because it is located deeper within the abdomen.

Undescended testes can occur on one side (unilateral) or both sides (bilateral). If both are undescended, further evaluation is necessary to rule out underlying syndromes or hormonal disorders, says Dr Roger.

An undescended testis is typically detected during a routine physical examination of a newborn. If the condition is identified at birth, the doctor will usually inform the parents and advise them to return for follow-up assessments.

In some cases, even if the testicle has not descended at the time of delivery, it may still move into the scrotum naturally within the first 3 to 6 months of life.

Dr Roger says: "An initial observation period of 3 to 6 months is gen-

erally recommended, as a significant number of cases will resolve on their own during this time."

However, if it remains undescended beyond six months, it is unlikely to descend spontaneously and the child should be referred to a paediatric urologist or paediatric surgeon for further evaluation and management.

"The condition can sometimes be missed during early infancy, so it's important for parents to be observant," Dr Roger adds.

One red flag is if the scrotum appears asymmetrical or if one side seems empty.

In most cases, the affected side looks smaller or less developed. When everything is normal, the scrotum usually has more visible skin creases, explains Dr Roger.

Parents often notice something amiss during routine activities like bathing their child or changing diapers. Although most cases are identified between 1 to 2 years of age, there are instances where the condition isn't

addressed until adolescence or even adulthood.

In fact, some men only realise one testicle is missing in their 30s or 40s, sometimes after getting married or having children.

In some adolescents, surgery is scheduled around ages 15 or 16. Regardless of the age at diagnosis, an undescended testis generally requires surgical correction.

"When counselling parents, we explain that one of the main reasons for surgically correcting an undescended testis is to reduce the risk of testicular cancer later in life," says Dr Roger.

Research shows that they are 4 to 10 times more likely to develop testicular cancer compared to the general population.

Early detection and timely surgical correction are also important for preserving fertility.

If the condition is treated early, it can usually be corrected successfully with minimal to no lasting impact on the child's health or development, he adds.

Surgical correction significantly



Undescended testes can sometimes be missed during early infancy, so it's important for parents to be observant, says Prince Court Medical Centre consultant urologist and robotic surgeon Dr Roger Anthony Idi. PICTURE CREDIT: PRINCE COURT MEDICAL CENTRE

reduces the risk of infertility, testicular torsion and testicular cancer later in life.

In addition to the physical benefits, treatment also helps prevent potential psychological effects, especially during the adolescence and teenage years.

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SHE'S dying. The words were said bluntly, matter-of-factly. I felt my heart tighten, but then I shook off the feeling of fear and dread because Mum has had so many close shaves, surely this was yet another.

But Nurse Mastura, who said those fearsome words to me on Thursday, was right. My mother's time was finally up and she passed away on Saturday, Aug 2, at 9.50am. I was there holding her hand when she breathed her last.

She was 91, which meant she had almost a century of a lifetime, and that is pretty amazing. Indeed, for the most part, Mum lived a good life with Dad who spoiled her quite a bit.

After Dad died in 2016, it was clear she missed him terribly and her last seven years were hard. I realise now I actually documented her decline into advanced dementia in this column, beginning in 2019. That was when I described how my life had changed after retiring that year and having to look after Mum all by myself when my Indonesian maid went on a home visit for two months.

I talked about having to take her blood glucose and pressure readings, giving her insulin jabs, making her meals and bathing her – things that she had previously managed herself.

Just a year later, when Covid-19 hit us all hard, Mum's decline worsened. She became quieter, slept a lot more, got confused over simple things like her meals, and she started to slur her words. She would fixate on small matters and get very agitated over them. She became physically weaker, too, and was so prone to falling, we had to confine her to a wheelchair.

I tried to stem the decline but to

Freed finally from dementia's cruel grip

After years of suffering, my mother's passing came peacefully.

JUNE HL
WONG



So aunty, so what?

no avail. Two years later, in 2022, I wrote how she had become detached from reality. She had regressed to an infant-like state and kept spitting out her food.

It was heart-breaking to see my once chatty, opinionated mother reduced to barely speaking because she struggled to find the words. In place of speech, she resorted to moans and groans.

I described it like she was at sea and drifting further and further away. This was the "inevitable goodbye", which was the title of the column.

Just 15 months later, I again wrote about Mum celebrating her 90th birthday in January 2024. Sadly, there wasn't much to celebrate on her becoming a nonagenarian. By then, her mental state was so bad, she had stopped speaking completely and showed

little emotion or reaction to anything or anyone. She had to be fed with food blended to puree consistency.

My mother had become my child. And like a child who liked sweet things, she would open her mouth for cakes, ice cream and soft cookies. But that did not prevent her from losing weight.

From a cuddly, plump grandmother with pink round cheeks, she would shrink to almost skin and bones by the time of her passing.

After she was discharged from hospital for pneumonia in February this year, her geriatrician, Dr Khor, warned my sisters and I that while Mum might have made it back home this time, she could come down with another infection at any time and we had to decide if we wanted to admit her again.

It was clear that there was hardly any quality of life left for Mum as dementia continued to ravage her mind and body. If we kept sending her to hospital to keep her alive, we would only be prolonging her suffering.

That was when Dr Khor referred Mum to Hospis Malaysia as an end-life patient. This was truly a godsend and that was how Dr Jonas and Nurse Mastura came into our lives like angels.

They checked on Mum regular-

ly and gave us invaluable advice and counselling on how to care for her. Her biggest enemy was phlegm – thick, choking mucous that made swallowing and breathing difficult. That is yet another complication as dementia progresses.

I bought devices to loosen the phlegm and to suck it out. I rented an oxygen concentrator for times when her blood oxygen level dropped precariously. This rarely happened until late last month.

A month ago, she developed a lung infection. Mastura administered antibiotics and her visits increased to weekly. Even though the infection cleared, Mum was further weakened.

When the oximeter showed the oxygen saturation dipping into the 80s, we panicked even though the doctors and nurse kept advising us not to obsess over the numbers. The Monday before her passing, despite being on the oxygen concentrator, Mum's level remained low.

After consulting the Hospis medical team, Mastura prepared morphine shots for Mum as she had started to make really loud and long groaning sounds.

But with her 13 years of experience in palliative and end-life care, Mastura had heard something before making that heart-stopping pronouncement:

that Mum was dying and we needed to be prepared for it.

What she heard was the "death rattle". I was stunned. I had heard the term before but never really knew what it meant.

This is a sound that can be like a gurgle or a rattling noise that a person makes when he or she is no longer able to swallow or cough to clear saliva and mucus from the back of the throat and upper airways. It is a common sign that someone is nearing death.

I couldn't believe it because the sound I heard was more like a soft gurgle than a rattle.

That sent me to the Internet to research it and the findings left me shaken. With that sound, death is imminent within 16 hours to 48 hours.

Left with little hope of a recovery, I began informing my family members living overseas to come home. But none could make it in time to see Mum one last time because she was gone 48 hours later.

While I grieve, I take solace that she went peacefully and is no longer suffering.

I am also glad we took Dr Khor's advice and had planned her funeral and final resting place in advance. To give time for my siblings to return from abroad, the two-day wake will be held tomorrow and Friday and burial is on Saturday.

With help from many good people, we will be able to give our Mum, Mary Magdalene Wong Yoot Ho, a Catholic farewell as she would have wanted it.

Goodbye, Ma. May you be reunited with Dad, the love of your life, in heaven.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.