

'Watch What You Eat to Stay Healthy

Friday, 30 | 11 | 2012 Source: The Straits Times
By: Salma Khalik

Expert sees link between diseases and what we eat

AT LEAST two in three people with diabetes, heart disease and colon cancer or who have suffered a stroke could have avoided the potentially deadly ailments if they had led a healthy lifestyle. Dr Walter Willett of the Harvard School of Public Health said there is a direct link between what and how much we eat and these serious medical problems. Studies have shown that people who drink one can of soft drink a day increase their risk of getting diabetes by 25 per cent. This escalates to 50 per cent if they have two servings a day, and so on. "A can of Coke has 10 teaspoons of sugar," said Dr Willett. "Nobody can eat that much sugar, but they can drink it right down. Drinking sugar in liquid form is becoming a global epidemic. The consequences will be huge."

Similarly, a study from Shanghai found that women who eat a lot of white rice are 60 per cent more prone to getting diabetes than those who consume little white rice, he said. The healthier choice would be brown rice and other whole grains. The school and the Culinary Institute of America hold an annual Worlds of Healthy Flavours conference in the United States, at which they try to convince about 50 of the most influential corporate chefs to design healthier menus. As chefs who decide on menus for hotels or fast-food chains, or who provide pre-prepared food for commercial kitchens, their food is eaten by tens of millions of Americans. This year, in collaboration with the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health and Health Promotion Board, the two institutions organised a three-day Worlds of Healthy Flavours Asia conference in Singapore, which began on Wednesday. There are about 100 invited guests, mostly executive chefs, including those working in hospitals. Delegates not only hear the theory behind healthy food, but they also get to see top chefs cooking healthy and tasty food, and can sample such food during breakfast, lunch and tea breaks at the conference.



Chefs Violet Oon and Malcolm Lee preparing a healthy dish at the Worlds of Healthy Flavours Asia conference yesterday. Delegates get to hear the theory behind healthy food and sample such food at the three-day event. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

A major focus of the conference, which ends today, is on obesity and diabetes, both of which affect about 11 per cent of the adult population here. Both are on the rise. Obesity has been increasing at a rate of 1 percentage point a year, while the number of diabetics here is set to hit half a million by 2020. An obese person is six times more likely to get diabetes than someone who is lean. Diabetes is a major risk factor in heart disease and stroke, besides causing kidney failure and blindness, and results in two limb amputations a day here. "With the right dietary choices, physical activity and by not smoking, we can prevent over 90 per cent of Type 2 diabetes," said Dr Willett. Type 2 diabetes develops when the body is not able to produce enough insulin, or not able to use it properly. Type 1 diabetes, often called juvenile diabetes, occurs when the pancreas does not produce insulin. Dr Willett added: "This is an almost entirely avoidable disease."

Healthy cooking tips

- Choose whole grains like brown rice over refined grains like white rice.
- Include fruit and vegetables with every meal. Frozen fruit and vegetables, with no added sugar or salt, are just as nutritious.
- Snack on fruit, vegetables and nuts, rather than processed snacks and sweets.
- Add beans, lentils and other legumes when possible. They are rich in fibre, protein and healthy carbohydrates.
- Add healthy fats by cooking with plant oils like soya bean oil, extra virgin olive oil and peanut oil, rather than palm oil, which contains high levels of saturated fat.
- Choose water, coffee or tea in place of sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Cut calories with smaller portions of rich, high-calorie foods.
- Reduce salt intake by cooking with fresh ingredients in place of processed foods.
- When shopping for sauces, compare products and buy those lower in sodium.
- Choose wholegrain breads and cereals for breakfast.
- Choose seafood and poultry over processed and red meats.
- Experiment with nut flours, legume flours, and wholegrain flours in cooking.
- Use nut butters in place of kaya and other sugar-sweetened spreads.
- Beans, lentils and other legumes and nuts are good sources of healthy protein that can replace meat in many dishes.

- Use fresh herbs, spices and aromatics to make healthy foods more flavoursome.

These tips for healthier cooking are from the Culinary Institute of America and the Harvard School of Public Health.