

ENVISIONING A HEALTHIER NATION WITH THE HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD

Food paradise - Singapore. Known for its culinary delights from Nasi Lemak, Chilli Crabs to Hainanese Chicken Rice, there are restaurants, hawker centres, coffee shops and 24-hour eateries to be found across the island selling an array of different dishes.

However, along with great food comes the issue of tackling obesity in Singapore, which in part, is due to unhealthy diet and eating habits. The Health Promotion Board's 2010 National Nutrition Survey showed that 60 per cent of Singapore residents eat out at least four times a week. Due to this frequency, it is easy for Singaporeans to exceed their recommended daily energy intake as an eat-out meal contains an average of 700-800 calories.

Singaporeans have not only increased their caloric and fat intake, they are also not consciously consuming enough whole-grains, fruit and vegetables. It is more important now than before for the food services sector in Singapore to work together in improving the dietary quality of food served to the customers.

HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD'S FOOD STRATEGY AIMS TO CHANGE THE WAY SINGAPOREANS EAT AT HOME AND EAT OUT

Launched in 2014, the Food Strategy is one of the key initiatives to realise the vision of the Healthy Living Master Plan, announced in April this year. The accessibility to healthier food is one of the commitments made by HPB and the Ministry of Health to provide Singaporeans with at least three healthy living options near their home, office and schools by 2020.

Through the Food Strategy, people would have more healthier food choices that are affordable and accessible. It comprises three key initiatives which are underpinned by strong partnerships with the Food & Beverage industry -

- a) the Healthier Dining Programme
- b) the "Ask for" Lower Sugar Beverage Initiative
- c) the Healthier Choice Symbol Programme

THE HEALTHIER DINING PROGRAMME

The Healthier Dining Programme marks the first phase of the Food Strategy which aims to make lower calorie meal choices readily available across the island. A Healthier Dining Grant is available for food service providers to draw on for the expansion and promotion of healthier menu offerings. Outlets under the programme can also participate in HPB's marketing drive to get more people to eat healthy.

In a steady climb since its launch, the Healthier Dining Programme has garnered much support from the industry, with over 1,200 F&B outlets including restaurants, cafes, kiosks, caterers, food courts and hawker stalls serving healthier meals, making healthier choices increasingly accessible for diners. To date, 40 food service providers are on board the programme, more than double the number of partners since its launch in 2014.

There has also been an upward trend in demand for healthier meals at participating eateries. In May 2015, 950,000 healthier meals were sold, a more than 80 per cent month-on-month increase compared to the 525,000 healthier meals sold in June 2014. In total, more than 9.4 million healthier meals have been sold since the launch of the Healthier Dining Programme.

More recently, to encourage Singaporeans to consume a complete healthier meal when dining out, the latest extension of the Healthier Dining Programme sees the pairing together of healthier food and drinks. Healthier Dining Partners can draw on the Healthier Dining Grant to introduce innovative reduced-sugar beverages at their outlets.

THE "ASK FOR" LOWER SUGAR BEVERAGE INITIATIVE

The National Nutrition Survey 2010 showed an increase in the proportion of Singaporeans who add sugar to their beverages. Currently, 60 percent of Singaporeans consume two or more sweetened drinks a day. On average, sweetened beverages contributed about 200 calories to Singaporeans' daily calorie intake, mostly in the form of empty calories, which make them feel hungry more quickly and easily, and hence likely to consume more food than necessary.

To encourage Singaporeans to choose reduced-sugar beverages when they dine out, HPB is working with partners to encourage Singaporeans to consume reduced-sugar or no sugar beverages in food courts, coffee shops, café and kiosks. HPB is also working with major drink manufacturers to increase the availability of reduced-sugar drinks and water products in the community, schools and workplaces.

THE HEALTHIER CHOICE SYMBOL PROGRAMME

Products with the Healthier Choice Symbol contain less sodium, saturated fat and sugar. Some products are also higher in calcium, dietary fibre and whole-grains, than others in similar food groups. The National Nutrition Survey 2010 showed that Singaporeans who include Healthier Choice products in their diet have better nutritional profiles, for example lower saturated fat intake and higher calcium intake.

Since the Healthier Choice Symbol was introduced, the number of Healthier Choice Symbol products has grown with the increasing acceptance and demand for healthier products. To date, there are 2,500 Healthier Choice Symbol products available across 70 food categories.

This year, as part of the effort to promote healthy eating at home, HPB has partnered with 4 major supermarkets and 8 food manufacturers to launch the “Shop Healthy. Get More from Life” campaign in 235 supermarket outlets across the island to increase the awareness of healthier choice options and encourage shoppers to choose healthier products.