Delay No More – Eat Right, Be Active Today

By **Dr Tee E Siong**, Chairman of Nutrition Month Malaysia Steering Committee

Malaysia stands at a critical health crossroad. For several decades, we have grappled with a double burden of malnutrition – the paradoxical coexistence of undernutrition alongside a skyrocketing prevalence of overnutrition and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Driven by a culture of sedentary behaviour and the convenience of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor diets, the well-being of large proportion of the population is under siege.

Why hasn't the nutritional problems declined after years of intervention? An important reason for this is the culture of procrastination. We often tell ourselves we will start on that healthy diet next week, or join the gym once work gets less busy. But we never got around to do either one of these. This delay is silently accelerating chronic disease risks across every age group, from children to the elderly.

The Wake-Up Call: NHMS 2023 & 2024

These **National Health & Morbidity Surveys (NHMS)** serve as a sobering reality check. The surveys highlight that high proportions of the population had poor dietary practices, resulting in inadequate intake of essential vitamins and minerals. Meanwhile, the reports pointed out that 1 in 3 Malaysian adults are physically inactive. Resulting from such unsatisfactory lifestyle practices, total rates of overweight and obesity among adults continue to climb from 50% in 2019 to about 54% in 2024. The reports also highlighted the worrying high prevalence of risk factors of NCDs: about 30% of adults have hypertension, similar percentage have high cholesterol, and 15% have diabetes.

This is why **Nutrition Month Malaysia 2026** has pivoted to a direct, urgent theme: **"Delay No More – Eat Right, Be Active Today."** It is a clarion call to stop treating health as a future project and start treating it as an agenda for today.

Understanding "Delay No More"

"Delay no more" is more than just a catchy slogan; it is a fundamental shift in how we approach our daily lives. It means acknowledging that "the perfect time" to start a healthy lifestyle does not exist. The only time that matters is now.

Waiting until a doctor delivers a grim diagnosis before changing your habits is a high-stakes gamble. Lifestyle changes are significantly more effective – and much easier to maintain – when they are proactive rather than reactive. By choosing healthier meals today or taking a 20-minute walk this evening, you are placing a down payment on a healthy future for yourself. Stop waiting for "the right time" and start building sustainable routines of balanced eating and active living starting today.

Eating Right: You Are in Control

Healthy eating is the key to a healthier you and your family. A healthy diet isn't about strict restrictions or giving up your favourite foods; it's about making informed choices based on balance, variety, and moderation. Practising healthy eating should begin early in life, as habits formed young often last into adulthood. Delay no more; put the following into practice every day:

- **Healthy eating – the basics:** Follow the Malaysian Food Pyramid as your healthy eating guideline: foods at the base should be eaten the most, while foods at the tip should be eaten the least. The quarter-quarter-half formula is also a great way to start eating healthy: a half of your plate should consist of vegetables and fruits, a quarter of carbohydrate foods, and another quarter of protein foods. Remember to limit the intake of sugar, oil/fat and salt (S.O.S).
- **Mind your gut for healthier, happier you:** A healthy gut balance is important for your digestive health, immune system, and overall wellbeing. Include probiotics in your diet, which you can get from yoghurt, cultured milk drinks, or kimchi. Don't forget fibre-rich foods like whole grains and vegetables to help with digestion. Water is important too!
- **Smart protein choice – the power mix:** Combine protein foods from animal and plant sources to get the "complete package" for your muscle strength and heart health. You can do this by consuming a variety of fish, lean poultry, or eggs daily, at least one serving of legumes (e.g. tempeh, tofu, dhal) daily, and a handful of nuts four times a week.
- **Healthy, tasty and economical home-cooked meals:** Cooking at home allows you to make meals healthier without sacrificing flavour. Enhance flavour naturally with herbs, spices and umami-rich ingredients, instead of using salt and sugar. Use healthier cooking methods like steaming, grilling, and boiling, instead of deep frying. Cooking at home also enables you to customise meals to different members of the family with different nutritional needs.
- **Dine out smart:** When dining out, use the "ask" strategy – ask for gravy on the side, less sugar, less rice or noodle, etc. If you're ordering through a delivery app, add instructions to use less oil or add more vegetables before ordering. Share dishes with your family or friend if the portion size is huge. Remember to use the quarter-quarter-half rule if you can fill up your own plate. And choose healthier options based on the ingredients and cooking methods described in the menu.

Moving More, Sitting Less

Being physically active is the key to good health and quality longevity. To be physically active doesn't mean having a gym membership or doing an hour of high-intensity exercise continuously daily. The target is to make movement part of your daily routine. The goal is to reduce sedentary behaviour – the "sitting disease" that plagues office workers and students alike. Delay no more; get active from today.

- **Make it a daily routine:** Adults should aim for 150-300 minutes of moderate activity or 75-150 minutes of vigorous activity weekly, while children and teens should aim for at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity daily.
- **Spread it out:** The activities can be done throughout the day/week in 10-30-minute sessions, e.g. a 10-minute brisk walk in morning, a 10-minute lunchtime stroll, a 20-minute jogging session after work, a 10-minute active playtime during recess, a 30-minute badminton session after school, etc. This allows you to find time for physical activity amidst busy schedule.
- **Find variety:** Mixing different types of movement keeps your body stronger, more balanced, and resilient as you become older. This also helps prevent boredom and keeps you consistent. Activities can range from endurance-based activities like jogging, swimming and brisk walking, and strength-focused activities like squats and push-ups, to activities that promote flexibility and balance like yoga, Pilates, and tai chi.
- **Reduce fat, build muscle:** Another purpose of physical activity is to achieve and maintain a healthy weight by reducing excess body fat, while building muscle at the same time. Train

major muscle groups two or more days a week, on non-consecutive days to allow muscle recovery. Avoid fad diets that may cause fatigue, nutrient shortages, and muscle loss.

- **Active commuting and "stealth" exercise:** Small changes in your routine can yield big results. Park further away from the entrance, take the stairs instead of the lift for the first three floors, or walk to the nearby shop instead of driving. These "stealth" movements accumulate into thousands of extra steps per week.
- **Family-centric fitness:** Instead of bonding over a heavy late-night supper, try "active socialising." Take the family to a local park for a walk, go for a weekend hike in one of Malaysia's many forest reserves, or join a community Zumba or martial art class.

The Time is Now

The time to take action is today, not tomorrow, not next week. Taking the first step to redirect your lifestyle to a healthier path may seem daunting, but it can start with something small and simple – choosing plain water over sweet drinks, a brisk walk over a nap, or brown rice over white rice. The most important thing is consistency and urgency. The time for planning has passed. **Delay no more – eat right, be active today!**

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This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2026, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly organised by Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM), the Malaysian Dietitians' Association (MDA) and the Malaysian Society of Body Composition (MSBC).

Nutrition Month Malaysia is back with an exciting Food-Fit-Fun Fair in Sunway Velocity Mall Cheras this coming 4 – 7 June 2026! Bring your family and join us for fun engaging activities, free nutrition screening and dietary advice from nutritionists and dietitians and grab goodies from our exhibitors. Find out how everyone in family can realise their health and wellness goals for a healthier life. For more information visit, https://www.nutritionmonthmalaysia.org.my