

Headline **Sweet killer**
Date **15 Nov 2009**
MediaTitle **Sunday Star**
Section **Nation**
Journalist **AUDREY EDWARDS**
Frequency **Weekly**
Circ / Read **320,964 / 1,072,000**

Language **English**
Page No **1,5**
Article Size **628 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **23,501**
PRValue **70,503**



Sweet killer

Rising sugar intake causing more deaths

EXCESSIVE sweetness may lead to a bitter end – diabetes, a disease that is causing more deaths a year than breast cancer and AIDS combined. And two out three people with diabetes eventually die from heart disease or stroke.

The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) estimates that some 285 million people worldwide will live with diabetes next year. They include 1.84 million Malaysians, aged from 20 to 79, or 6.8% of the population. IDF also predicts that close to 24,000 Malaysians will die of the disease next year.

Malaysians are also getting diabetes at an earlier age while a third with diabetes are not aware they have the disease.

Malaysia ranks 17th highest out of 216 countries, with a comparative prevalence rate of 11.6%. The country with the highest rate is Nauru, with a third (30.9%) of its 8,800 population affected the disease.

In conjunction with World Diabetes Day yesterday, Malaysians should note that their favourite cup of teh tarik (350ml) contains about six teaspoonfuls of sugar. The recommended daily intake of sugar is 50gm or 10 teaspoon-

fuls.

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DIABETES FACTS WORLDWIDE

- > Each year seven million people develop diabetes.
- > Every 10 seconds: - A person dies from diabetes-related causes, - Two people develop diabetes.
- > Seven of the 10 countries with the highest number of diabetics are in the developing world.
- > Type 1 diabetes, which mainly affects youth, is rising alarmingly at a rate of 3% per year.
- > In the 1970s, Malaysians only consumed 17 teaspoonfuls of sugar per person per day, but it is up to 24 now.
- > Early this year, the country was ranked the world's eighth highest sugar user.

Graphics by: Joshua Foong, Mohd Ali Mohd Noor and Hassan Bahri

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White danger : A bottle containing almost one kg of sugar — what an average Malaysian consumes in a week, according to the Consumers Association of Penang.

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Diabetes threat bigger than H1N1

Malaysia on the way to becoming a 'sick nation', warns health expert

AUDREY EDWARDS

PETALING JAYA: The country is heading towards becoming a "sick nation" as far as diabetes is concerned, a health expert has cautioned.

"The (diabetes) situation is getting worse. It could get worse than H1N1 or AIDS if the people don't do something about their health," Malaysian Diabetes Association president Prof Dr Ikram Shah Ismail said.

He said a National Health and Morbidity Survey in 2006 showed a prevalence rate of 14.9% for those aged above 30, with a third of Malaysians with diabetes not being aware of it.

The survey also estimated that about 70% of diabetics in the country had poor control over the disease.

About 95% to 98% of those affected have Type 2 diabetes, which is non-insulin dependent.

Dr Ikram said neglecting medication or continuing to indulge in sweet food like ice cream contributed to poor control of diabetes.

"And there are those who do not see the doctor regularly, so they don't know what their control is like. The problem with diabetes is that

those with a HbA1c reading of more than 10 do not show symptoms. They feel normal even if their blood glucose is high," he added.

The ideal target for good control of diabetes is having a HbA1c (a blood test that provides the average of blood sugar control over a three-month period) reading of 6.5% or lower.

He said Malaysians were also getting diabetes at an earlier age.

"They are not healthy because they are not eating healthy food or exercising. Previously, although they had the genes, they did not get diabetes until they were much older," he added.

Consultant endocrinologist Prof Datuk Dr Khalid Abdul Kadir, who is a professor of medicine at Monash University Malaysia, said the country's increased prevalence rate was similar to that in Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

He added the effects of the Government's intervention programmes to promote a healthy lifestyle had not been evident.

Dr Khalid and a team of research-

ers are studying whether stress increases the risk of humans developing diabetes.

Tests conducted on rats by the team determined stress as a risk factor.

In **PUTRAJAYA**, Dharminder Singh reported that Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the National Strategic Plan would be launched early next year to combat the rising number of cases of non-

communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular problems.

The plan was formulated after the National Health and Morbidity Survey reported the percentage of obese Malaysians aged 18 and above had risen from 4.4% in 1996 to 14% just 10 years later while cases of diabetes among those aged 30 and above rose from 8.3% to over 14% during the same period.

He added that obesity was a worrying trend because it increased health risks.

Liow spoke to reporters after launching the "1Malaysia Brings Diabetes To Light Campaign" yesterday.