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LOWER CALORIES WITHOUT LOSING CULTURAL CONNECTION

After a recent national survey which showed obesity is on the rise, the Health Promotion Board is working hard with grassroots organisations and the food industry to help different ethnic groups modify their diet without losing that cultural connection to their cuisines.

Singapore, 21 April 2012: Well known by food lovers for their scrumptious Malay fare, selected hawker centres at Geylang Serai will now be celebrated for something else – offering healthier food choices without compromising on price, taste or enjoyment.

2. Working with the Health Promotion Board (HPB), at least three hawker centres around Geylang Serai have started using whole-grain noodles, brown rice bee hoon, healthier oil and salt, and selling drinks with lower sugar content.

3. The participating stalls serving traditional Malay dishes such as mee siam, mee rebus, nasi lemak and nasi padang are located at:

- Eunus Crescent Block 4A Market and Food Centre
- Haig Road Market and Cooked Food Centre
- Geylang Serai Market and Food Centre

4. In 2010, the National Health Survey (NHS) found that 24 per cent of the Malay community are obese, a figure which is double the national average. Furthermore, the survey revealed that 28 per cent of the community have high blood pressure and 23 per cent have high blood cholesterol, which are also the highest percentages across all races.

5. High blood pressure and high blood cholesterol are both risk factors for stroke and heart disease. As a result, the incidences for stroke and heart attack in the community are about 240 and 404 respectively per 100,000, compared to about 155 and 207 per 100,000 across all races.

6. Consuming excess calories, excess salt and foods high in saturated fat can lead to obesity, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. Findings from HPB's National Nutrition Survey (NNS) 2010 show that the Malay community consumes more calories, total and saturated fat, and less whole-grains than other Singapore residents. Deep-fried foods such as deep-fried snacks and fast foods, stir-fried dishes such as fried rice and stir-fried vegetables, coconut dishes and flavoured dishes such as nasi briyani, nasi lemak and chicken rice, contribute up to 50 per cent of their saturated fat intake. The community also consumes about a third more salt than the recommended amount.

7. Said Associate Professor Fatimah Lateef, Grassroots Adviser for Geylang Serai and Member of Parliament for Marine Parade GRC: "The incidences of obesity and chronic illnesses such as hypertension, high blood cholesterol, ischaemic heart disease and stroke are highest for the Malay community. One reason for this is the community's dietary choice and lifestyle decisions. Day-to-day dietary intake can have a significant impact on the community's health. Thus, it is important to create and enhance awareness, and give them healthier choices. This does not mean that we have to compromise on taste and flavour because healthier substitutes are available at affordable costs these days. As eating out, especially at hawker centres, is popular, it is important that we get stall holders to buy in on the idea of healthier choices in their cooking and food preparation. I hope the idea will catch on with more stall holders and the public as we do more educational programmes. Lower salt, unsaturated oil, whole-grain and wheat or brown rice substitutes can be just as delicious when supplemented with flavours from lime, spices and chilli."

8. As Singaporeans have a strong emotional and cultural connection to their food, HPB decided that one way to cut the calories is by helping residents create ethnic dishes using healthier ingredients and cooking methods, beginning with the residents at Geylang Serai due to support from their Grassroots Advisor, Citizens' Consultative Committee (CCC) and Merchants' Association.

9. Speaking about the findings of a recent consumer insights study done in collaboration with the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer, HPB, said respondents from the Malay community acknowledge that their eating habits are less healthy compared to other ethnic groups: "Our respondents recognise that they use plenty of oil and eat many deep-fried dishes. A number also perceive healthy food to be tasteless, expensive and not easily accessible. However, there is a willingness to choose healthy food if it is tasty, affordable and accessible. With this detailed and updated understanding of the community's eating habits, HPB began to look into ways that can overcome the cultural and psychological barriers to healthy eating, and motivate residents to change their diet."

10. One strategy in the fight against obesity, said Mr Ang, is to ensure that hawker centres offer healthy and tasty dishes to debunk the perception that healthy food is bland, costly and difficult to find. This was why HPB embarked on a pilot project to transform Yuhua Market and Hawker Centre into Singapore's first Healthier Hawker Centre last year.

11. "Since Yuhua Market and Hawker Centre became HPB's first healthier hawker centre, overall business there picked up by about 20 per cent. Stall owners who initially had reservations about the idea soon became convinced of the business value of offering healthier choices to customers. In fact, every stall uses healthier oil now and the aggregate demand for brown rice has increased by 35 per cent. I believe that business will also be as promising at the latest healthier hawker centres in the Geylang Serai area," Mr Ang said.

12. The three popular makan hubs at Geylang Serai were picked to kick-start this ethnic-focused version of the Healthier Hawker Centre initiative. In addition to linking stall owners to suppliers of healthier ingredients – such as fat oil that is less saturated and salt with lower sodium – to ensure food prices remain the same, and advising cooks on healthier cooking methods and serving sizes, HPB also provided participating stalls with menu boards to showcase the lower calorie count of their food and drinks.

13. To date, about 75 per cent of the stalls at Eunos Crescent Block 4A Market and Food Centre have switched to healthier ingredients and cooking methods. Over at Haig Road Market and Cooked Food Centre and Geylang Serai Market and Food Centre, 60 per cent and 30 per cent respectively have done so.

14. Explaining that the challenge is to create popular traditional dishes which give the same emotional connection and satisfaction taste-wise, using healthier ingredients and cooking methods, Mr Ang said: "Working closely with HPB's nutrition team and chef, Epok Epok Central at Eunos Crescent Block 4A now offers nasi lemak prepared with healthier oil and less coconut fat, which means reduced saturated fat for its customers. Elsewhere, at number 19, a stall called Osman prepares mee rebus and mee siam using whole-grain noodles and brown rice bee hoon. Although they are healthier, the well-loved dishes at these stalls remain deliciously familiar."

15. To help increase demand for healthier foods at these hawker centres, HPB will be conducting regular roadshows to provide free samples of healthier food as well as food coupons to use at participating healthier food stalls.

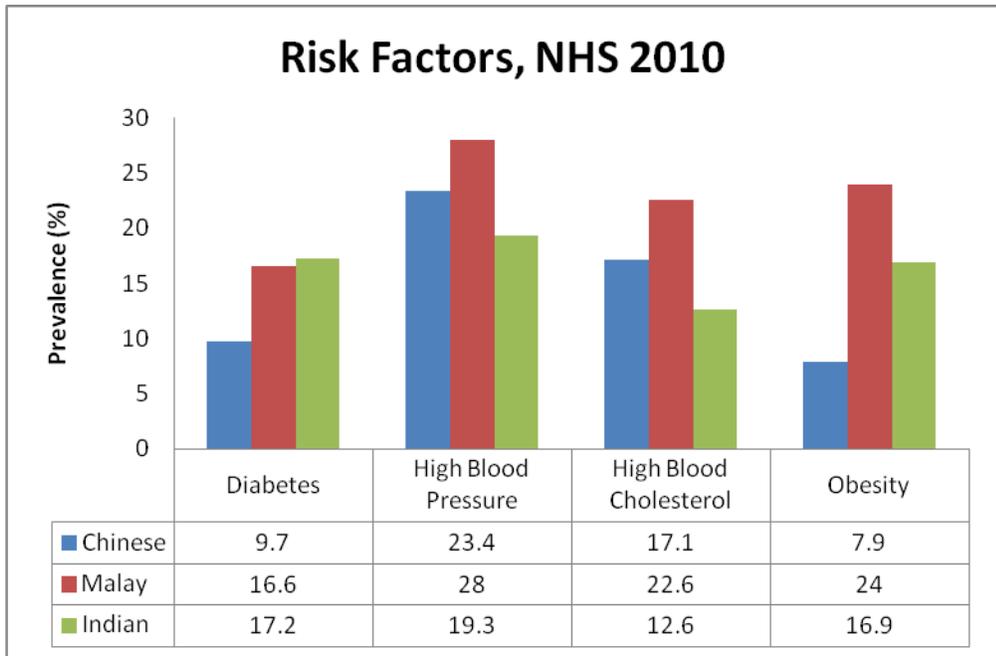
16. HPB's second strategy in the fight against obesity involves helping families prepare healthier home-cooked meals. To this end, HPB has been working with grassroots organisations and mosques to introduce healthy cooking classes and healthy supermarket tours.

17. To support these programmes, HPB is also training grassroots and mosque volunteers to be Health Ambassadors, who will promote a healthy lifestyle, provide basic health advice and facilitate healthy cooking classes and supermarket trails.

18. Mr Ang reminded that a healthy lifestyle has to be holistic: “Beyond helping Singaporeans eat right, these popular food joints at Geylang Serai have also become the first Healthier Hawker Centres to go smoke-free, in support of HPB’s Blue Ribbon smoke-free movement, which is an initiative launched in March this year to recognise active tobacco control advocates in the business community. I am certain a number of Singaporeans will be drawn to these hawker centres, which not only offer healthier choices but a smoke-free dining environment.”

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Annex 1: Prevalence of Risk Factors
 (Source: National Healthy Survey, 2010)



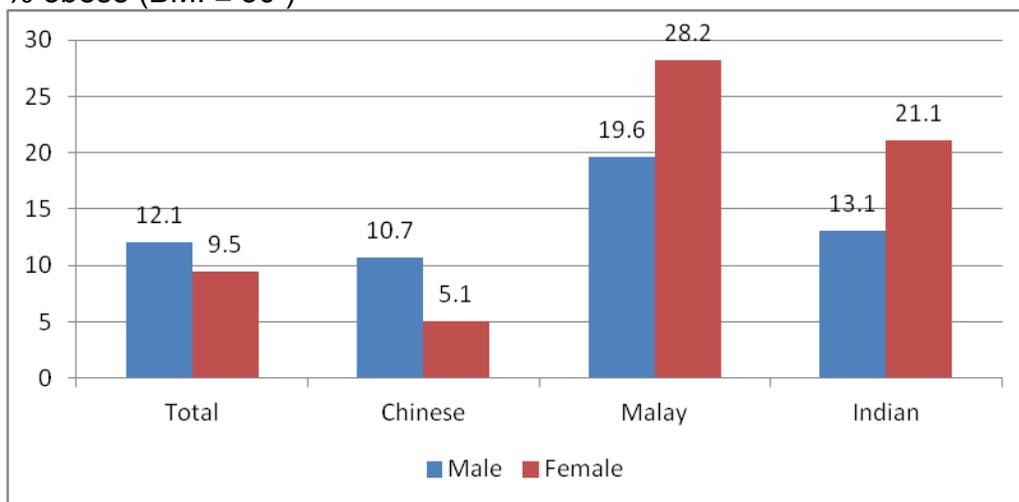
Risk Factor Prevalence (%) by gender and ethnicity :

Risk Factors	Males		Females		Total	
	Diabetes	Chinese Malay Indian	10.6 16.2 20.2	Chinese Malay Indian	8.9 16.9 14.0	Chinese Malay Indian
Hypertension	Chinese Malay Indian	27.2 26.0 21.2	Chinese Malay Indian	19.7 29.8 17.2	Chinese Malay Indian	23.4 28.0 19.3
High Blood Cholesterol	Chinese Malay Indian	17.6 24.7 15.7	Chinese Malay Indian	16.7 20.6 9.2	Chinese Malay Indian	17.1 22.6 12.6
Obesity	Chinese Malay Indian	10.7 19.6 13.1	Chinese Malay Indian	5.1 28.2 21.1	Chinese Malay Indian	7.9 24.0 16.9

Red denotes Malay ranking highest among the races

Annex 2: Prevalence of Obesity
(Source: National Health Survey, 2010)

% obese (BMI ≥ 30)



Annex 3: Average Energy, Total Fat, Saturated Fat and Salt intake
(Source: National Nutrition Survey, 2010)

Nutrient	Males		Females		Combined Gender		Recommended Intake
Energy (kcal/day)	Chinese	2906	Chinese	2322	Chinese	2613	Males : 2250-2720 Females: 1875-2080
	Malay	2990	Malay	2379	Malay	2671	
	Indian	2983	Indian	2229	Indian	2643	
	Total	2927	Total	2322	Total	2624	
Total Fat (g/day)	Chinese	102	Chinese	83	Chinese	93	Males : 75-91 Females: 63-69
	Malay	107	Malay	85	Malay	95	
	Indian	105	Indian	80	Indian	93	
	Total	103	Total	83	Total	90	
Saturated Fat (g/day)	Chinese	38	Chinese	30	Chinese	34	Males : 25-30 Females: 21-23
	Malay	43	Malay	34	Malay	38	
	Indian	43	Indian	32	Indian	38	
	Total	39	Total	31	Total	35	
Salt (g/day)					Chinese	8.4	5
					Malay	7.6	
					Indian	8.7	
					Total	8.3	

Red denotes Malay ranking highest among the races