

MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEY 2018 SHOWS GRADUAL IMPROVEMENTS IN SINGAPOREANS' DIETARY HABITS

The increasing trend of average calorie intake over the years has shown signs of slowing, but sugar and sodium intake remains high

Singapore, 19 November 2018 – The latest National Nutrition Survey shows that Singaporeans' diet quality has improved, with Singaporeans consuming more wholegrain, fruits and vegetables, as well as substituting saturated fat¹ with unsaturated fat. However, high sugar and sodium intake remains a cause for concern.

Started in 1998 as a six-yearly, cross-sectional survey to monitor the diet and nutritional status of Singaporeans, the National Nutrition Survey will now be conducted on a continuous basis from 2018. This allows for more timely tracking of the nutritional status of Singaporeans, and enables us to respond with policy moves more flexibly and quickly. A full report will be published every two years based on combined survey findings from the prior two years.

Key 2018 Survey Findings

Singaporeans are consuming fewer calories, with the average daily energy intake dropping five per cent from 2,600kcal in 2010 to 2,470kcal² in 2018³, although this is still higher than in 2004. The Singaporean diet has also shifted towards one that is lower in carbohydrates. The overall diet composition is in line with international guidelines.

Singaporeans are also consuming better-quality carbohydrates, with a shift from refined to unrefined carbohydrates. Between 2010 and 2018, the proportion of unrefined carbohydrates as a proportion of total carbohydrates went up by three percentage points, from 14% to 17%. This was largely the result of increased consumption of wholegrain, as well as fruit and vegetables. This shift is corroborated by market trends, where sales of wholegrain rice and bread, as well as fruit and vegetables have been on the rise. While the shift to unrefined carbohydrates is encouraging, there is room for further improvement.

Similarly, the dietary quality of fats in the Singaporean diet has improved, with unsaturated fat displacing saturated fat. In fact, saturated fat as a proportion of total fat decreased by two percentage points in 2018 when compared to 2010, from 38% to 36%.

Protein intake was also largely adequate, with nearly 80 per cent of Singaporeans meeting the daily recommended protein intake.

¹ For every 1,000 calories consumed, there is a three-fold increase in wholegrain consumption and four percent increase in fruit and vegetables intake. Healthier unsaturated fat is also displacing the unhealthy saturated fat as a source of energy, contributing to an improvement in the quality of dietary fat.

² On average, an adult male requires about 2,200 calories a day, while an adult female requires about 1,800 calories in a day.

³ More data points are required to establish whether there is a declining trend.

However, high sugar intake is still a cause for concern. Singaporeans' total sugar intake has increased to 60g in 2018, from 59g in 2010, contributing to about 10 per cent of total energy intake. Singaporeans are consuming less sugar from drinks, but more from food, for example, confectionery and desserts. Nonetheless, pre-packaged sugar-sweetened drinks remain the single largest source of sugar in the diet, and more needs to be done to reduce sugar consumption from this source.

In addition, Singaporeans are consuming too much salt, with 90 per cent exceeding the recommended amount of 5g per day. The average daily salt intake was 9g in 2018⁴. This was contributed mostly by seasonings, salt and sauces added during food preparation (i.e. during stir-frying or marinating, or the addition of soya sauce and/ or stock powder when cooking), which make up 75 per cent of salt in the diet.

On the whole, Singaporeans are eating less and diet quality has improved, but palates have also shifted towards richer, sweeter and saltier foods. The Health Promotion Board will continue our efforts to encourage Singaporeans to eat healthily and improve their diet quality.

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About Health Promotion Board

The Health Promotion Board (HPB) was established in 2001 as a statutory board under the Ministry of Health with the vision of building "A Nation of Healthy People". HPB aims to empower the people of Singapore to attain optimal health, increase the quality and years of healthy life and prevent illnesses, disability and premature death. As the key partner of national health promotion and disease prevention programmes, HPB spearheads health education, promotion and prevention programmes as well as creates a health-supportive environment in Singapore. It develops and organises relevant health promotion and disease prevention programmes, reaching out to the healthy, the at-risk and the unhealthy at all stages of life – children, youths, adults and older Singapore residents. HPB's health promotion programmes include nutrition, mental health, physical activity, smoking control and communicable disease education. HPB also promotes healthy ageing, integrated health screening, and chronic disease education and management.

More information can be found at www.hpb.gov.sg.

⁴ Food-based assessment of salt was done for the first time in 2018. A different method (based on 24-hour urine collection) was used to measure salt in 2010. Hence, no comparative results are cited.