

More protein in ice cream, soups to boost seniors' health

HPB plans to work with firms on high-protein foods that aid in retaining muscle, bone mass

Salma Khalik
Senior Health Correspondent

Half the seniors in Singapore are not getting enough protein in their diets, increasing their risk of not just fractures, but also of dying.

To increase their intake, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) plans to work with food manufacturers to reformulate products so they contain higher levels of protein to help people aged 50 years and older keep their muscle and bone mass.

The move will be a throwback to what Singapore did in 1956, when it

added fluoride to water to improve dental health.

HPB's chief executive officer Zee Yoong Kang said in an interview with The Straits Times that he expects to have a range of such foods available from next year.

Last year's National Nutrition Survey found that half the people here aged 50 years and older do not eat enough protein, which leads to weight loss, frailty and higher risk of falls.

Mr Zee hopes that increasing the protein content in soups, porridge and even ice cream and herbal jelly will raise the proportion of older people getting enough protein by 50 per cent – or to three in four.

The board said it is too early to name the manufacturers. The idea is to add plant-based protein to the food without affecting the taste.

This is already done by pharmaceutical companies for products for

seniors such as milk drinks Ensure Plus from Abbott, which has 12.5g of protein, and Enercal from Wyeth, which has 14g of protein per serving.

People start losing both bone and muscle mass at the half-century mark unless they increase their consumption of protein by about 50 per cent at that point, said Dr Annie Ling, HPB's director of policy, research and surveillance.

This means that they will need to eat about 12g more protein a day – which is roughly an additional brick of tofu, or two eggs, or a slightly smaller than palm-size piece of chicken.

Dr Tan Shi Ming, an orthopaedic surgeon at Singapore General Hospital, said osteoporosis or loss of bone mass increases fragility and risk of fractures, especially of the hip, wrist and spine. Sarcopenia, or loss of muscle mass, makes the el-

derly more prone to falls, functional decline and death.

More than 2,000 people fracture

People start losing both bone and muscle mass at the half-century mark unless they increase their consumption of protein by about 50 per cent at that point... This means that they will need to eat about 12g more protein a day – which is roughly an additional brick of tofu, or two eggs, or a slightly smaller than palm-size piece of chicken.

their hips here each year.

Dr Tan said the outcome of hip fractures for older people is generally poorer as they have lower reserves and other medical problems, making them more susceptible to complications. They may also lose muscle mass during the period of inactivity until they recover.

The Singapore Chinese Health study, a longitudinal study which has tracked subjects for more than two decades, found a 39 per cent higher risk of death among people with significant weight loss of 10 per cent or more.

The National Population Health Survey 2017 found that between their 40s and 60s, Singaporeans lost an average of 10 per cent of their weight. Mr Zee said: "A lot of older people don't realise they need more protein."

Some might also find it difficult to change their eating habits to consume more protein.

He believes that it would be easier to increase protein content in the foods people normally eat than to get them to increase their food intake to meet their protein needs.

While there are foods such as milk which are enriched with higher levels of protein on the market, this is lacking in Asian staples and food products.

salma@sph.com.sg

Heng joins heritage walk that raises \$1m for TTSH fund

Zhaki Abdullah

Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said he has been a "big beneficiary" of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), and also noted the important role the hospital has played in Singapore's history.

Following a stroke during a Cabinet meeting in 2016, Mr Heng – also the Minister for Finance – underwent surgery at TTSH and was hospitalised there for six weeks.

Yesterday, Mr Heng took part in an 8km charity heritage walk, held

to mark the hospital's 175th anniversary.

Named Tan Tock Seng's Journey after the hospital's founder – 19th-century businessman and philanthropist Tan Tock Seng – the walk took almost 2,000 participants from Pearl's Hill – the hospital's original site – to its current location in Novena.

The walk raised \$1 million for the TTSH community fund, which supports needy patients requiring medical aids, as well as medical research and community health initiatives.

Set up in 1995, the fund has more



Participants along Eu Tong Sen Road during Tan Tock Seng Hospital's charity heritage walk yesterday. The 8km route, which goes past significant places in Tan Tock Seng's life, was organised to mark the hospital's 175th anniversary. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



A SPECIAL GSS SURPRISE FOR SPH SUBSCRIBERS

X7.1 IperEspresso Machine

\$398 (U.P. \$625)

Includes FREE delivery and a Tin of IperEspresso Medium Roasted Capsules + Stand a chance to win 3 tins of capsules and an Illy Art Collection Yoko Ono 7 espresso cups and saucer set.

Get yours now at www.readsph.sg/stilly
Promotion ends 31 Jul 2019



than 100 patient-centred programmes.

The fund supports more than 2,500 needy families and disburses more than \$2 million each year.

Yesterday, Mr Heng met and thanked some of the doctors and nurses who took care of him in 2016, noting they still remembered his craving for coffee after his surgery.

Adding that there were three dif-

ferent care teams that looked after him across the three daily hospital shifts, he said: "So I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for taking such good care of me, my wife and my family during this period."

Citing a recent report which found Singaporeans had the longest life expectancy in the world at 84.8 years, Mr Heng said people here need to be better prepared to

stay healthy in their old age.

He noted that Health Minister Gan Kim Yong and his team, together with healthcare professionals here, are working on helping senior citizens to continue to stay active and healthy.

"We are shifting from just healthcare to health. Let's do all of that together," said Mr Heng.

azhaki@sph.com.sg

Dengue surge

Over 370k inspections done, 900 homes fined in first 5 months: NEA

Tee Zhuo

More than 372,000 inspections were carried out by the National Environment Agency (NEA) in the first five months of this year to check on mosquito breeding across the country amid a surge in dengue cases.

Of these, about 6,500 instances of mosquito breeding habitats were found, NEA said in a statement yesterday.

NEA also fined around 900 households for breeding mosquitoes.

The two largest clusters for dengue – the deadly disease carried by the Aedes mosquito – are both in Woodlands, including Woodlands Avenue 6, Woodlands Circle, Woodlands Crescent and Woodlands Ring Road. Together they accounted for 360 cases.

Other large clusters were found in Geylang, including Guillemard Road and Sims Avenue (115 cases); Chai Chee (112 cases); and the Thomson area, including Jalan Lembeh Thomson, Soo Chow Rise and Upper Thomson Road near Lakeview (99 cases).

In these areas, 74 per cent of the breeding occurred in homes, which is much higher than the national average of 60 per cent.

These official figures come at a time of an islandwide surge in dengue cases.

As of 3pm on Friday, there had been 5,534 dengue cases this year, about four times the figure in the same period last year.



Instances of profuse mosquito breeding found in homes inspected by the National Environment Agency. It found 6,500 cases of breeding habitats during inspections in the first five months of this year. PHOTO: NEA

For the week ending on the same date, there were 467 cases of dengue fever – the highest weekly number since March 2016.

Five people have died from dengue so far this year. The latest victim, an 84-year-old woman who lived in Geylang Lorong 6 – one of the largest active dengue clusters – died on June 14.

While the five clusters have accounted for the bulk of the increase in dengue cases, there has been a "general uptrend" across Singapore, the statement said.

"The dengue transmission is therefore not localised, and everyone has to be alert to the threat," it added.

NEA warned that with the warmer months from June to October, a national collective effort is critical to prevent dengue cases from rising further.

"All residents living in cluster areas are strongly encouraged to cooperate with NEA officers, and facilitate their checks and indoor misting in their homes," NEA said.

The Straits Times reported last Thursday that between 2017 and last month, at least 175 households were served legal notices for failing to allow NEA officers into their homes for dengue-related inspections.

teezhuo@sph.com.sg