

# Making weighty decisions

■ By Prof Dr Mohd Ismail Noor

IT'S human nature. We tend to fix something only when we think it's a problem. However, with certain things, this attitude can get us into trouble.

Take obesity, for instance. Many think it is a symbol of prosperity but this perception should now change to a sign of poor health.

It puts you at higher risk of diabetes as well as heart attack and stroke. Many overweight individuals hear this all the time but still don't think they have a problem.

Their BMIs (weight in kilogramme divided by the square of their height in metres) may be over 25kg/m<sup>2</sup> (lower at 23kg/m for Asians), the "increased risk" threshold. But they're feeling on top of world. Never mind the fact that their blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol or triglycerides may be rising — it's nothing a couple of pills can't fix.

But if you are concerned about your excessive body weight, read on.

## ● Acknowledge the problem

You need to feel that your body weight is a problem that needs fixing.

If you don't feel it is an issue or something that needed your attention, then it's not a problem. But if you think something is amiss, then you're ready to work on the solutions.

## ● Get to the source

Start with a little soul-searching over why you're overweight.

Different people have different reasons which led to their weight problems. Yours may not be dramatic; it could be as plain as wanting to lavish yourself with food after enduring a poor and hungry childhood.

## ● Be clear on what you want

Knowing the root source of your weight problem may help you understand the magnitude of your weight reducing challenge and help you determine the solutions. But it's just as important to be clear why you want to lose weight.

Without a clear and meaningful goal, you'll have little reason to watch your diet and sweat it out. Only you can decide if reducing your body weight is worth the effort.



## ● Identify the solutions

Reducing body weight can be difficult and it gets even harder if you have diabetes or other obesity-related disease. Choosing to battle the bulge on your own may lead to a greater likelihood of failure or feelings of frustration.

Without professional guidance, you may also increase your health risks by trying out counter-productive or even potentially harmful

weight loss methods (eg severe dieting, missing meals or taking dubious supplements).

Consult your doctor, dietitian or nutritionist to work out solutions that not only fit the problem but also fit you. But you have to decide on specific action — how much and when to eat, how to start exercising and so on.

Your health professional can only tell you about the advantages or disadvantages of your decisions. They cannot decide for you.

## ● Small steps to long-term benefits

It's not effective to have goals and solutions if you do not have a realistic plan of action.

You may aim for a BMI within the normal range of 18.5–24.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup> as your long-term goal but you can only get there by making an honest effort to change your eating patterns and to exercise regularly.

To minimise failures you need to plan how to take control of behaviours like food choices, exercise and/or taking medication.

Feel good every time you make a right choice, whether it's to eat right or get out there for a bout of exercise. Remember, without effort, results will be hard to come by.

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■ Fight Against Diabetes is initiated by the National Diabetes Institute (Nadi) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Malaysia, Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Dietitians' Association and Malaysia Association for the Study of Obesity. For enquiries, call 03-56378588.

## Weight loss in diabetes

HELP to decrease insulin resistance and improve your blood glucose levels, blood fats balance and blood pressure with the following steps:

● Take three regular meals daily but in moderation.

● Reduce consumption of high-fat and high-sugar foods.

● Exercise by itself has only a modest effect on weight loss. However, exercise improves insulin sensitivity, acutely lowers blood glucose, and helps in long-term maintenance of weight loss.

● The weight-reducing effects of be-

havioural changes may be enhanced by other weight loss strategies including medication that cause reduced food intake (by enhancing the feeling of fullness) and stimulating energy expenditure.

● Drug therapy alone may not produce the desired weight loss without dieting and increased physical activity, thus it may not be a good choice unless patients are willing to change their lifestyle.

● Gastric reduction surgery can be an effective weight loss treatment for severe obesity (BMI of 35 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or more).

● You are encouraged to seek professional help for more specific advice.