

ISSUE 32 / 2017

# my Alvernia

Inspiring Healthy Living

## DIABETES

How to be more aware and in control of your health

## GETTING JUNIOR TO READ

Tips to inculcate good reading habits

## AGE BOLDLY & LOUDLY

Endless possibilities to ageing gracefully

# It's the Season of Hope

SPREADING WARMTH AND JOY OF CHRISTMAS TO THOSE WHO NEED IT.

# Winning @ Weaning Workshop

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- **Which is better: Purees & Mashes or Baby-led weaning?**
- **In the first place, is my baby ready for solid food?**
- **What about food allergies?**

Join us and learn from our nutrition experts about weaning steps and a hands-on practice session on how to prepare simple culinary delights for your little ones!

## PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

- ♥ Introducing solids
- ♥ Demonstration using various food textures
- ♥ Practical session on making baby food

Each registration is for 2 pax.

\*Workshop Fees - \$38 per couple

\*Fees cover practical tips on weaning, food ingredients used in the class and a book on simple home cooked meals for your baby.

Light refreshments are provided during class. Each attending couple will receive a weaning starter pack.



Register now at [www.mtalvernia.sg/weaning-workshop](http://www.mtalvernia.sg/weaning-workshop)

If you need to find out more about the session, please contact us at 63476702 for more information or email us at [mah@mtalvernia.sg](mailto:mah@mtalvernia.sg)



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Letter to Dr Lim Kwang Hsien, Consultant Paediatrician at Kinder Clinic Pte Ltd at Mount Alvernia Hospital

**Q** Can you explain how exercise can help build a child's immune system, and how much exercise should the very young (under 6 years) and older, school-going children do a week?

**A** There are many theories on how exercise can help build up our immune system. This includes stimulating the production of cells involved in the immune system and improving the cardiorespiratory function of the body. I am unaware of any specific scientific study that explains how exercise can help build children's immune systems. However, like adults, children who have active lifestyles and who exercise regularly generally keep their bodies fit and healthy.

Exercise can be formal and informal. Most young children (before primary school going age) will engage mainly in informal exercises as part of their family bonding activities such as cycling,

playing in the park or swimming. Some have one or two sports activities in which they will participate according to a prescribed training programme. School going children (from primary one upwards) tend to have more formal exercise programmes as part of their school activities or CCAs. In addition, our current school programme includes 3-4 physical education (PE) sessions a week. Such programmes offer more than adequate exercises for them.

It is important to remember that one should not have the misconception that exercise will promote recovery during severe illness. Excessive exercising when a child is sick can have the opposite effect.

To promote an active lifestyle, children should be encouraged to learn a sport if possible. Parents should try to plan bonding activities involving more outdoor informal exercises instead of sedentary indoor activities such as watching movies, shopping and playing video games.





#### Letters to the Hospital

Hi there! My wife is expected to deliver in mid-March next year, and we are interested in the Family Suite at Mount Alvernia Hospital. We would like to find out how many Family Suites your hospital has and how much in advance I need to book in order to have a higher chance of securing it.

Thank you for considering us. At the moment, we have one Family Suite located at Our Lady's Ward. However, we do not take advance bookings. All rooms will be allocated depending on availability at the point of admission.

You can fill in the pre-admission form at <http://forms.mtalvernia.sg/pre-admission/> and state your room preference so we can try to make arrangements nearer to the expected delivery date.

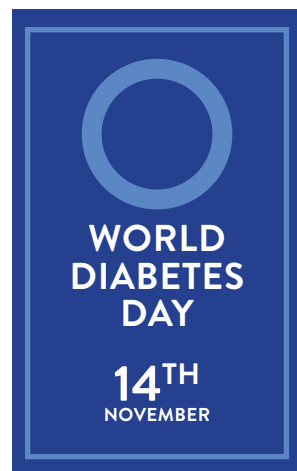
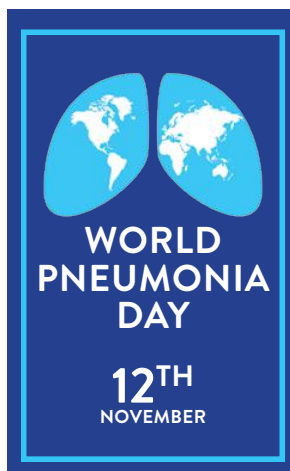
Hi, I understand that there is a shuttle bus service at Bishan & Novena MRT stations. Could you let me know where is the exact pick up point?

The pick-up point for both locations are at the bus stop nearest to the MRT station, facing the main road. The pick-up point at Bishan is nearest to the North South Line exit, next to the 7-11 convenience store (bus stop no. 53231) whereas at Novena, it is directly in front of Novena Square and Exit B from the MRT station (bus stop no. 50038). For the bus schedule, please refer to the link here: [mtalvernia.sg/shuttle-bus-services/](http://mtalvernia.sg/shuttle-bus-services/)

My baby was born at Mount Alvernia and is almost 9 months. I would like to find out about your weaning workshop? What are the upcoming dates and how can we register? We are hoping to learn more about what foods to make for her.

You can learn more about the monthly workshop at [mtalvernia.sg/maternity/our\\_care/weaning-workshop/](http://mtalvernia.sg/maternity/our_care/weaning-workshop/).

There's a registration button you can click on this page and it will show you the schedule of the sessions by month.



# Message



**We are always driven by the desire to improve the quality of care for our patients, and anchored by our FMDM values, to serve all with love.**

This is a reflective time of year where many of us will take stock of what we have experienced and achieved in the past year. While I reflect on the many successes the hospital experienced in 2017, I am also focused on the imminent tasks in our hospital roadmap and plausible changes in the overall healthcare landscape in the future.

We just completed a successful ISO audit in September and transitioned to the latest 2015 ISO standards. It is timely as over the next few years, the hospital will be undergoing major renewal projects to upgrade existing facilities such as the endoscopic suites, operating theatre and health informatics systems. In addition, we are also planning to add more beds to ensure that a comprehensive spectrum of care is readily available to our patients.

Now on to a topic that has been in much focus – the war against diabetes. It is no longer just about managing the disease, but also the social, emotional and economic impact this chronic disease has on the individual, the family and the country. Our team of specialist doctors and clinicians recently presented at a Continuing Medical Education session for doctors on the care and management, in conjunction with the

World Diabetes Day. In addition, we hosted two public forums to help increase awareness on the prevention and management of diabetes. Battling this disease will be challenging but we can start by living a healthy lifestyle; exercising, eating right, as well as doing regular health screenings to pick up and manage the disease early.

Our Nursing Code Blue Committee (that deals with medical emergencies) recently held a Continuing Nursing Education programme themed “Save A Life”. It is our first neonatal, paediatrics, maternity and adult emergency programme to deepen the emergency knowledge and skill set for our nurses. Being in the front line of emergency situations, our nurses are critical to our patients’ lives and striving to do their utmost to ensure positive outcomes.

Sharing our nursing experience overseas, the nurses recently went on a second expedition to Kampong Chhnang, located at the North-west of Cambodia, to conduct infant resuscitation training and the use of nebulisers and neopuffs for paediatric respiratory issues to the local healthcare team comprising of 33 doctors, midwives and nurses.

The expedition was a result of a partnership with WAH Foundation, a Cambodian

non-government organisation dedicated to its mission of improving the lives and conditions of rural communities in Cambodia, through sustainable clean water and health projects. We are also grateful to Bodhi Meditation Singapore for sponsoring the resuscitation machines to the local province hospital.

For the Art @ Mount Alvernia programme, we are proud to share that this is going into its fourth year. In the newly operational St Joseph’s ward, you can now see the latest art works from the students from Hai Sing Catholic School adorning the walls along the corridors and in the rooms.

It has been a busy and exciting year for Mount Alvernia Hospital. We have taken on some transformative steps this year, some of which will take the next few years to fulfil. While we make major decisions and pursue new projects, we are always driven by the desire to improve the quality of care for our patients, and anchored by our FMDM values, to serve all with love.

May I end off with a heartfelt wish to you and all at home, a peaceful and blessed Christmas and a Wonderful 2018!

Dr Lam Kian Ming  
CEO  
Mount Alvernia Hospital





*Serve all with Love*

May the blessings of  
**CHRISTMAS**

be in your heart and  
may your new year be filled with Christ's love



The nativity drawing by the late  
Sister Janeen Earley, FMDM

**HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND  
A WONDERFUL NEW YEAR!**

*In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. Job 12:10*



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*Serve all with Love*





# Short Takes

Little Thoughts,  
Highlights &  
Happenings

# Takes

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# HOW TO KEEP YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTION

It's always easy to start penning down new year resolutions. It is the keeping up and checking off the list that is hard.

Before penning down the goals, here are a few tips to help you stay resolute as you start to define your year-long goals for 2018.

## START SMALL

Always make resolutions that you can manage and keep. Take for instance, eating more at home together as a family or


adding fruit or yogurt in each meal.

## CHANGE ONE BEHAVIOUR AT A TIME

It is almost impossible to be a changed person overnight. Removing a bad habit takes an equal amount of time and effort as making a good habit stick. And there's no need to do a complete overhaul and personal reflection to achieve it either. Instead, work toward changing one thing at a time.

## GET SUPPORT

It is more fun to be doing something together with families and friends. It helps to have someone checking on you and encouraging you to keep up. And as you do the same for others, it is a reminder that there are goals to keep. Plus doing things together creates a connection within the group which makes you feel you are not alone.

Have a Healthy and Active 2018! 

# 2018





HERE ARE SOME COMMENTS COLLECTED IN A POLL POSTED ON FACEBOOK:

“Traditionally, blue is associated with boys and pink is associated with girls. But if you look around, that has changed. Both my daughters started with pink as little girls when they were not ready to decide. Now they are totally into strong dark colours. And my son is into pink.”

Yellow is a good neutral color to select.

I pick white every time. It is easier and can be passed to the next baby or my friends' babies if they keen to use them.

I mainly went for neutrals, white and some green perhaps.

Blue is for boys  
Pink is for girls  
What about purple, red, and orange?

- Phim, Hello Poetry

## Blue for “It’s a Boy” & Pink for “It’s a Girl”

According to Smithsonian.com, there was a time when white was the colour for all baby wear and diapers.

Colours became more gender specific after the war. But at that time, blue was for girls and pink was for boys. According to an article published in June 1918 from the trade publication Earnshaw's Infants' Department, the generally accepted rule was pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason was that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, was more

suitable for a boy, while blue, which was more delicate and dainty, is prettier for a girl<sup>1</sup>.

### HOW DID PINK BECOME A CHOICE FOR GIRLS?

Jo B. Paoletti, a historian at the University of Maryland believes that this cultural shift of blue for boys and pink for girls came towards the end of the 1970s.

She said societal and cultural factors such as children's books, pervasive advertising and women's movements were main factors that contributed

towards the switch. Paoletti also attributed it to pre-natal testing; leading to desire for individualised merchandise.

Manufacturers were quick to promote pink for girls and blue for boys so that parents could outfit their children in the 'appropriate colours'.

Today, if you gaze into any hospital nursery or even when you just do a random search online for things to buy for a newborn – blue rules for all things “It’s a Boy” and pink for “It’s a Girl”.

<sup>1</sup> From <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/when-did-girls-start-wearing-pink-1370097/>



## A taste of Christmas

Spending Christmas in the hospital, or having your loved one being warded during this holiday is generally not fun. In addition to decking our wards with cheerful festive decorations, we are also serving up the must-have traditional turkey and ham on our special Christmas menu along with soup, dessert and salad. A little gesture to make our patients and their families feel all homey warmy!

# Unveiling the newly renovated and refurbished St Joseph's Ward

The St Joseph's Ward is one of the oldest medical and surgical wards in the hospital. Since August, it went through an extensive "makeover" which will allow us to improve care activity and experience for our patients. In addition, it will help the hospital deal with the ever-increasing demand for specialised medical care and attention. The location: next to the Cardio Vascular Laboratory and on the same floor as the day surgery and operating theatres allowing for a quick and effective transfer for our patients.

Attention has been on the overall facility design and resources for enabling safe care. A weight sensing fall alarm mat is now added to each bed where the signal is integrated into our nursing call bell system. Hence should patients who are supposed to call for assistance when getting out of bed get up unaided, the pressure of the pad is removed, sending the signal directly to alert the nursing station.



## Sneak Peek at Shops

In November, the retail thoroughfare at the D'ato Lee Kong Chian opened with additional food and beverage outlets and a convenience store. Here's a peek at them:





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# New Year's Resolution to Smile More

Many make New Year's resolutions like losing weight, improving fitness or eating better, yet, few would think of improving oral hygiene as one of their New Year resolutions.

**Y**our dental health is just as important as keeping fit, eating well and having a balanced lifestyle; and this New Year is a great time to add that into your resolutions. Furthermore, it is an easy resolution to achieve considering that we brush our teeth at least once a day!

## THE MOUTH AS THE GATEWAY TO OVERALL HEALTH

Having a good set of gums and teeth facilitates social integration; smiles are more confident and there are fewer problems with speech and pronunciation since one need not be embarrassed about badly stained teeth nor bad breath.

However, many are unaware of the correlation between oral and physical health. Poor dental

hygiene has been linked to deterioration of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, and is also found to lead to higher incidences of premature births among others!

"Poor nutrition due to bad dentition or prostheses can lead to slower healing and makes it more difficult to maintain a proper diet for blood sugar control," explained Dr Anthony Goh, dental surgeon from MT A Dental Centre.

Symptoms found through oral examinations like dryness of the mouth, certain smells or signs on the gums and tongue can also point to other systemic problems which may otherwise be undetected.

## A GOOD TOOTHBRUSH

"A good toothbrush is one that does its intended job: to remove plaque from

the surface and crevices of the teeth," said Dr Goh. He recommends a soft-bristled, small-sized head toothbrush as soft bristles can bend more easily than stiff ones to reach plaque deposited in hard-to-get areas between teeth; a comfortable handle also allows more control in directing the toothbrush head to clean every surface. "Electric toothbrushes are useful for those who have difficulty with their dexterity," he added.

## FLOSSING

Flossing is necessary for the maintenance of oral health as toothbrushes are unable to reach crevices well. Any floss, tape or interdental brush that performs its function of removing plaque from between the teeth is suitable. However, Dr Goh cautioned that it must not damage teeth nor gums in the process, and that some

people — such as those with bridges and implants or have severely-crowded teeth — may need special devices.

## REGULAR VISITS

It is advisable to go for dental check-ups once every six months. While it varies with each patient, aside from scaling and polishing, updating of medical records and changes in health status, a typical dental check-up includes an examination for gum disease, changes to jaw movements, enlarged lymph nodes and other signs; and if necessary, in-between tooth contacts, concerns or pathology under the gums and in the jawbones via x-rays. "Other than that, it is a good time to catch up with our patients," Dr Goh added. **A**







# IT'S THE *Season Of Hope*

**It has been an eventful year for community outreach and one that constantly reminds us of our steadfastness to bring equity of care and to serve all with love.**

**B**uilding a relationship and support system within the community is among the most important outcome of community outreach programmes. We are entering that time of the year when we see storefronts draped in gold and red fabric, glimmering lights cascading from the ceiling like hundreds of falling stars, and we find ourselves humming along

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas...” while buying groceries. While Christmas is undoubtedly a season of celebration, it is also a season of hope and all of us can do our part to spread hope to those who need it most by reaching out to our community. Read on to find out how community outreach programmes can instill or rekindle hope in others.

## HOPE FOR LOVE

“Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier,” Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was renowned for her undying love for the poor and forgotten, famously said. Her work showed that love is the greatest thing one can give and the most precious thing one can receive. Beyond charity work, poets and philosophers too have often talked about the power of love in motivating others to fight pain and hardships in life. But, caught in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, we often forget to perform simple gestures of love for others.

This season is a perfect time to revive the spirit of love and help rekindle the dimming hopes for love in many who may feel forgotten and left out due to poverty, sickness, or old age. Seeing others rekindle their passion for a cause or share their love with family and friends makes all the hard work that goes into

conducting an outreach programme worthwhile. Through our SPEctacular project in October 2016, two seniors regained their sight reviving the hope that they can do the things they love. Dr David Chan from Atlas Eye volunteered to perform the cataract surgeries. One of our beneficiaries, Mr Ong Thiam Seng, 71, can now focus on returning to the workforce as a painter as he is able to see better, while Mrs Tan Bee Yiok, 80 is looking forward to living more actively.

By conducting or volunteering for an outreach programme, we are reminded to love our community which calls us to set aside our individual preferences and combine our time, talents, and resources to help others. Having conducted our community outreach programme for close to nine years, and reaching out to more than 25,000 individuals, Mount Alvernia Hospital’s staff and volunteers have found that spreading the hope for love rarely requires grand gestures. Simple acts of kindness, such as a

warm smile and greeting, and patient and sincere interaction, have impact in buoying others’ spirits – rejuvenating the hope for love people have for them and they for others.

## HOPE FOR FAMILY

Family is the most important pillar of society and of one’s well-being. A survey conducted by Families for Life Council in 2016 showed that for over 700 respondents, 92 percent listed family as their priority over financial stability, personal health, career, friendships and hobbies. As family is an indispensable part of one’s life, it is not a surprise to see many people craving more quality time with their families. But, long working hours could stand in the way. Also, in a hyper-connected era, we are often distracted by noises which take away our time with the family. While these hurdles would not destroy our perception of the importance of family, they could erode it.

Participating in community outreach programmes can help to

rekindle our hopes for better, more cohesive family ties. We have seen how such programmes, for example the Community Chest Heart Strings Walk 2017, can be a medium to bring family members together to do meaningful and fun activities. Not only did the staff and family members contribute to a cause of creating an inclusive nation, they also enjoyed their time participating in games and activities during the walk. The act of giving to others can instill in us the importance of caring for one another and the time spent doing something together can strengthen the family bond.

Apart from strengthening family relationships, an outreach programme can help us find a family outside of our inner circle, and vice versa. By participating in such programmes, we are called to love our community and to be an active member of the community. The dedication and selfless acts done to improve the community will help us create bonds with the members, making us proud to call them our family.









## HOPE FOR COMMUNITY

Among the most important outcome of community outreach programmes is the building of a relationship and support system within the community. Living in an increasingly individualised society, where we do not interact with our neighbours as often as previous generations, we may start to feel left out and invisible. Solitude has started to become a prison to many and being involved in an outreach programme may be a way to break out of it. Regular participation can help to strengthen the sense of belonging to the community and form a community support group. In addition, we can relish in the fact that we have contributed to something that has a lasting, positive impact on our immediate community.

One of the target groups Mount Alvernia Hospital has been reaching out to is ex-offenders. Often stigmatised and ostracised by the community, many ex-offenders find it hard to re-integrate into society. Amid the unwelcoming environment, their hopes for community support could unravel and they

will be more segregated in the society. Hence, community outreach plays an important role to break this cycle. We have seen how ex-offenders can turn out to be valuable members of society given the support and opportunities to assimilate into the community. Apart from re-integration efforts, Mount Alvernia Hospital is also in talks with the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) to plan areas of health needs we can provide to the new Selarang House at Changi. This programme works to strengthen hope in the community by embracing the underprivileged and the stigmatised. This outreach gives them the hope of re-integrating into the community, while instilling hope in other members that they can count on the community when it matters.

## HOPE FOR FUTURE

While no one can predict the future, everyone surely crosses their fingers for a bright, sustainable future. But, with the rising geopolitical tensions around the world, it may be challenging to envision a peaceful future.

It is in our immediate community that we can take comfort and get assurance. In this trying time, community outreach programmes have become all the more important to strengthen our solidarity and empathy for others. Through close interactions with different members of the community, we will be able to better understand the problems faced by our communities. Being involved in an outreach programme helps to boost our hopes for the future as we develop civic and social responsibility attitudes and become more attuned to what our community needs, and how to help fulfill them.

Extending our arms beyond our immediate communities, Mount Alvernia Hospital has organised outreach programmes abroad, such as Kampong Chhnang in Cambodia, in partnership with a Cambodia-based non-governmental organisation WAH Foundation in May 2017. Mount Alvernia Hospital collaborated with WAH Foundation to deal with

post-natal issues, such as breastfeeding, caring for infants, and addressing the high incidence rate of paediatric respiratory issues. A vibrant province with 40 percent of its population below 18 years old, Kampong Chhnang has seen more than 4600 incidences of children up to 14 years old with respiratory issues. By working with 10 major health centres and donating equipment such as nebulisers to tackle respiratory problems, Mount Alvernia Hospital hopes to alleviate the rampant respiratory problems in the province.

Community outreach programmes that help to impart knowledge and skills, such as seminars, clinics, or health screenings, make a great impact. The newfound knowledge and skills can help to empower people and engage them in future campaigns, which makes it a vital platform to rejuvenate our hopes and outlook for the future.

## HOPE FOR HEALTH

With the advancement of technology and the developments in the medical and fitness industry, it is easy to be optimistic about better health and longer life expectancy. While we do have reasons to have high hopes, we are cautious not to get carried away. A study released in 2016 by the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation showed that while Singaporeans are living longer, eight years

on average, out of a total average of 82, are spent in ill health. This is where organising or participating in an outreach programme can be beneficial. By sharing the right knowledge and conducting necessary checks, we can help to cultivate and maintain realistic hopes for health. That is why Mount Alvernia Hospital conducts monthly home visits to the elderly. Joining arms with Duke NUS volunteers and SilverACE Lengkok Bahru, we conduct general health assessment and environmental scans to ensure that residential areas where the elderly dwell are clean, accessible and elderly-friendly. For urgent medical conditions, our outreach team would be

alerted and would assess on a case-by-case basis if a doctor's examination is required.

By bringing people together, our outreach programme helps to build a community for people to turn to should they need advice or assistance regarding their health. An outreach programme does not only benefit the immediate beneficiaries, but also the volunteers. Studies have found that volunteering could help to reduce depression and stress. It could also increase overall life satisfaction and help us feel good about ourselves as we are helping others.

Not all of us have the privilege of having good health. Those who are already experiencing

illness and those who are vulnerable may not be as optimistic when it comes to health. While a community outreach programme cannot be the cure, it can lend support to these groups of people. Mount Alvernia Hospital's Outreach Medical and Dental Clinics, for instance, provide heavily subsidised primary healthcare services for those in need. Having alternative support groups to help those in need when the existing system cannot cater to them helps to build a healthier community as well as improve an individual's health. **A**





A top-down view of several gingerbread cookies decorated with white icing and silver beads. The cookies are shaped like Christmas trees, stars, and snowflakes. They are scattered on a dark wooden surface covered with a layer of coarse, light-brown sugar. A few whole almonds and a cinnamon stick are also visible on the surface.

# What's Up Doc

Expert Advice  
on Good Health  
& Nutrition

pg20  
All About Diabetes




# Talking About Diabetes, *No Sugar Coatings*

Diabetes is a chronic medical condition, but you can beat it by being aware of its potential risks and taking control of your health.







**D**iabetes can lead to serious complications like kidney failure, blindness, and stroke. And is the No.2 cause of ill-health and death, after coronary heart disease in Singapore. In Singapore alone, about 440,000 residents aged 18 years and above had diabetes in 2014 and by 2050, the number is expected to surge to a million people. But public awareness on the illness remains low with one in three diabetics unaware about their conditions and even among those who have been diagnosed, the condition is poorly managed. So, we talked to two of our endocrine specialists, Dr Goh Kian Peng and Dr Kevin Tan, to learn more about the illness and ways to manage it.

### WHAT IS DIABETES AND WHO CAN GET DIABETES?

Diabetes occurs when the body produces insufficient insulin, a hormone that keeps our blood sugar in balance, or the body does not respond properly to insulin, resulting in high sugar levels in the blood. Dr Kevin Tan, an endocrine specialist at Kevin Tan Clinic for Diabetes, Thyroid & Hormones, and Vice-President of the Diabetic Society of Singapore, tells us there are three types of diabetes:

#### TYPE 1

The pancreas is progressively destroyed by the body's immune system (autoimmune) leading to insufficient production of insulin in the body and the person has to inject insulin to manage his/her blood sugar level.

#### TYPE 2

The most common type of diabetes affecting 90 per cent of people with diabetes around the world is caused by the body's ineffective use of insulin.

#### GESTATIONAL

Diabetes that occurs during pregnancy usually after the sixth month (24 weeks) of pregnancy. Most disappear after delivery, but it can return in subsequent pregnancies and in the future. It could impact the baby both during pregnancy and in the future.

#### RIISING CONCERNS

A lot of focus has been placed on type 2 diabetes in Singapore, and rightly so, because type 2 diabetes is the one of the fastest growing yet preventable diseases. According to Dr Goh Kian Peng, an endocrine specialist at Saint-Julien Clinic at Mount Alvernia Hospital, the age group most at risk for type 2 diabetes is those between 45 and 65 years old. But that does not mean those

below the high-risk age group can go about life with wild abandon and little fear of this disease.

"Type 2 diabetes risk is highly influenced by both lifestyle and family history. While many of us have not developed diabetes, we may be living a lifestyle that exposes us to a higher risk of getting it as we age," says Dr Goh. Recent study has shown that, based on projections, 34 per cent of people aged 24 to 35 in 2016 can expect to be diabetic by the time they turn 65. This is because despite the increasingly sedentary lifestyle as working adults, many continue to eat the same amount of food consumed during their active years or even more food due to higher disposable incomes. This results in excess calorie intake.

Another rising concern is gestational diabetes. One in five pregnant women in Singapore – one of the highest rates in the world – is affected by gestational diabetes. With inadequate care, diabetes can result in higher risks of maternal and child mortality and morbidity. Many women with gestational diabetes experience complications such as high blood pressure, large birth-weight babies and obstructed labour.

## WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT DIABETES?

“For many people, diabetes is an “unseen and unfelt” illness, hindering people from taking a proactive approach to detect and manage it. In fact, diabetes may remain undetected for years before being discovered,” says Dr Tan. As a result, many may have had complications from untreated diabetes by the time they are diagnosed. Such complications include bleeding at the back of the eye (diabetic retinopathy), kidney damage, stroke, heart attack, damage to the nerves and circulation in the feet.

In the case of gestational diabetes, while it does not usually cause birth defects and deformities, it can increase the risk of low blood sugar in babies, cause baby’s body to

be larger than normal, yellowish colour in baby’s skin, difficulty in breathing, and low calcium and magnesium levels in the baby’s blood.

Diabetes was the fourth and eighth most common condition of polyclinic attendances and hospitalisation respectively in 2014. The cost burden resulting from productivity loss and healthcare due to diabetes was a whopping S\$ 940 million in 2014 and is expected to rise to \$1.8 billion in 2050.

Beyond the social and infrastructure burden, untreated or poorly controlled diabetes can lead to disabilities, affecting an individual’s quality of life.

In some communities, such numbers have led to stigmatisation of diabetes patients. A study conducted in the US where 1.5 million people are

diagnosed with diabetes every year suggests that individuals with diabetes may face employment discrimination. They may be denied a job due to safety concerns or employer’s concern of low productivity and high rate of absenteeism.

In a Washington Post article, a former editor of Diabetes Forecast said that type 2 diabetes “is often dismissed as the disease of poor, fat, old, lazy people who can’t be bothered to take care of

themselves.” Although such harsh treatment may not be commonplace in Singapore, the rapid increase in the number of people with high risk of diabetes warrants a more proactive approach in preventing and managing the illness to reduce the economic and social burden of our community and loved ones.







## HOW TO LIVE WITH DIABETES?

“Simple things like buying food from hawker centres high in simple carbohydrates or delaying meals after taking diabetic medicines can worsen diabetic control,” says Dr Goh. As a result, controlling diabetes takes some effort as it requires a change in lifestyle and discipline to sustain it.

This includes losing extra weight, having a healthy diet, and adopting a regular exercise routine. Dr Goh concurs, adding that regular visits to the doctor to follow up on the illness and to screen for diabetic complications every year is a good habit.

To get us started on our lifestyle change, Dr Goh and Dr Tan recommend consuming more foods with high fibre content such

as fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans, seeds and whole grains. Not only are these ingredients known to have the potential to reduce diabetes risk and improve blood sugar control, they can also curb weight gain by making us feel fuller after a meal.

We should also strive for 20-30 minutes light exercise every day. Even brisk walks can do wonders, in addition to preserving muscle strength and coordination. Avoid fatty and sweetened food and beverages. Being mindful of our healthy weight and body mass index (BMI) is key. Achieve or maintain a BMI of < 23 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and/or a 5 to 10 per cent body weight loss. It is also a good practice to keep a glucometre at home to assess the diabetes control and to check for hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar).

Considering that

diabetic control is highly individualised as it is dependent on our current diet, lifestyle, work nature, and physical condition, professional help plays a critical role when it comes to lifestyle intervention. Working with professionals helps identify areas for improvement, providing us with practical and sustainable lifestyle changes that will work with our daily activities.

Dr Tan adds that a diabetic patient should consult the doctor every three to six months. This includes going for blood pressure, weight and feet check-ups. Foot examination is needed to check for the development of wounds, infections, calluses and numbness in any part of our feet.

As cardiovascular disease is responsible for 50 per cent of deaths in patients with type 2 diabetes globally,

diabetic patients should also monitor their heart health. Individuals with diabetes should also work with their doctors to keep on the look out for new kinds of drugs that can help manage their disease better. Some diabetes treatment drugs, for instance, can reduce heart disease and all-cause mortality by a third.

Diabetes is an illness with serious complications, but that should not add doom and gloom, and prevent anyone from living to the fullest. In fact, both doctors, Dr Goh and Dr Tan, agree without hesitation that diabetes can be controlled and managed throughout one's lifetime. And those suffering from the condition can retain a high quality of life. ▀



# A Very Special First Christmas With Baby

**Spending Christmas with your baby has its unique challenges and could spring a few surprises on new parents. However, it is no less magical and memorable for the new family.**

**B**aby's first Christmas is an important milestone, and one which most parents will want to make it special. Here are our favourite tips to help you have a memorable first Christmas with your new baby.

## START ON THE SAME PAGE

Christmas is a time when new parents often discover they have different ideas on what makes for a perfect childhood. Your idea of a perfect Christmas may be vastly different from what your partner is thinking. Ask your

partner well in advance how he/she imagine your baby's first Christmas to be.

And if you are like Ms Low Kar Yin who would likely be spending Christmas with her newborn, there's the additional consideration of celebrating baby's Full Month. "My baby will be around one month old by Christmas as my estimated date of delivery is on 24 November 2017. So, we may hold our Baby Shower around Christmas.

## SET YOUR OWN TRADITION

It is true that a newborn doesn't appreciate gifts or decorations as yet and

is probably too young to enjoy family traditions. And if you delivered a baby a few months before the Christmas holidays, you may be too tired to keep up between feeds, taking care of your newborn and yourself to be able to enjoy the Christmas cheer with your baby.

However, you will always remember Christmas the way your family spent it; and besides, with the addition to the family, it is a special time for everyone at home. Have a simple tradition of family and friends gathering, either in pot luck style or catered food.





“I have no plans yet on how to spend Christmas as I could still be within the first 30-day confinement period. But, we will definitely be celebrating, for the first time as a threesome. We may possibly bring our baby out together to have dinner with friends,” Kar Yin beamed.

### PRACTICAL GIFTS

This may be the only year your child doesn’t get to tell you what Santa should bring, so take advantage of the opportunity to give them something you really want them to have.

Your newborn won’t be able to actively join in all the festivities. But they will be captivated by the bright colours, sparkling lights, music and mood of the season. And your baby will go through several

developmental stages before next Christmas, so toys for 3-6 months old are great gifts for them. For instance, soft books or toys with high-contrast patterns and bright colours; and anything that moves slowly and produces a gentle sound, such as a mobile or other musical cot attachment is ideal for your little one.

A baby about six months old will discover hand movements and will start to bat and grasp at toys. Soft play mats or activity boards are good choices for this stage. In fact, any developmentally appropriate toys will always be popular choices for a baby’s first Christmas. Rattles, teething rings, and building blocks are also great choices.

This is also the time

where babies will also start putting everything into their mouths to explore so be sure to check that all toys are safe for chewing. Check the label and make sure they don’t have tiny parts that can break off.

You may want to give friends and relatives a gift list in advance, especially for your baby’s main presents. If you receive gifts that are not right for your baby, you could store them until she is old enough to appreciate them.

### CREATE MEMORIES

Christmas photos have a way of capturing happy childhood memories. They also document your child’s growth from year to year. There will be photos to commemorate your baby’s first Christmas, and you’ll probably be getting those photos of them sitting on Santa’s knee for many years to come. Why not start a family tradition of framing those photos and setting them up every year as part of your Christmas decorations? Most craft stores sell wooden Christmas ornaments that you can insert your own photos into. In years to come, these are the sorts of details which can reaffirm your child’s sense of belonging in your family.

### LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

A baby’s first Christmas is exciting, but it can also be stressful. Everyone has high expectations for the day, and when you blend families together

those expectations can be quite different from each other. Expect well-meaning relatives and friends to offer unsolicited parenting advice over Christmas meals, and expect nap times and feed times to go completely out the window. The secret to getting through that first Christmas is to smile sweetly when they offer advice and look for relatives and friends who can offer practical help. Remember that this is everyone’s first Christmas with this baby, including yours.

### CELEBRATE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF BEING A PARENT!

Most of all, take some time out of your day to bask with your partner in the joy of being parents to this little bundle. You should reflect on the changes that the past year has had on your lives.

“This is a start of a family Christmas for both of us. Our Christmas last year was having a simple meal together; relishing special moments we had to come this far and at the same time, looking forward to having a family of our own,” added Kar Yin.

Here onwards, it is going to be a different sort of Christmas for Kar Yin as she enters motherhood and enjoys every bit of raising her little one – looking forward to his first smile and first sounds. ■

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*Adapted from an article by  
Bellamy Organics*

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# Holiday Eating Rules at Christmas

## FOR EXPECTANT MUMMIES

Christmas is fast approaching and feasting is a large part of this celebration. Before you start piling your plates, here are few tips to help you eat safely and healthily.

**W**hether it is in the home or at restaurants, the dining table is always beautifully set for the mood and the delectable buffet looks very inviting. The good news is pregnant mummies can still eat most of what they want and not have to miss out! While you may be “eating for two” this year, don’t let your pregnancy be the reason to overload your plate. Besides, not all foods that are on the menu at Christmas time are completely safe for pregnant mummies to eat.

### EATING FOR TWO: REALLY?

Eating well and weight gain nourishes the unborn baby and supports you during breastfeeding. While much of this weight is increased fluid, enlarged breasts and uterus, and the growing baby and placenta, some of those extra weight will stay with mothers even after the birth.

And there are always meat, sugar, thick gravy, and butter in cakes

during Christmas which adds calories even if the amount of food consumed is still the same portion. “Eating for two is generally not recommended during pregnancy, especially with high calorie foods,” said Dr Goh Shen Li, senior consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at S L Goh Women’s Clinic.

“You risk developing gestational diabetes, indigestion from over eating and excessive weight gain for mummy or foetus.”

“A food that I look forward to at Christmas is the log cake. I liked it even before I was pregnant! My husband will nudge to remind me to watch my sugar level if I eat more log cakes than usual,” said Ms Evelyn Tan, who is in her third trimester.

### RUM SOAKED CAKES AND WINE

Some holiday baked goods, such as fruitcakes and certain sponge cakes are soaked in rum and brandy for taste. While it is a norm that preggies are discouraged from drinking

wine, a little wine at dinner for the occasion is acceptable.

“One unit of alcohol per week is not harmful to the pregnancy, so one glass of wine or a slice of rum soaked cake is ok,” Dr Goh advised.

But for Ms Tan, she decided to avoid alcohol completely during Christmas.

### LOOK OUT FOR RAW FOOD

Undercooked meat like beef or some seafood can be a health threat, especially to expectant mummies. In the case of smoked salmon or honey baked ham, although these are pre-cooked food and usually does not require re-heating, it may be worth the while to ensure that these are served to you cooked. However, they can still be eaten cold if you

are up to it. “I would avoid cold food during my first few months of pregnancy, but as I’m now in my third trimester, I would not entirely avoid cold food but eat these in moderation,” said Ms Tan. ■







# SKIN-TO-SKIN

**A baby loves to cuddle and snuggle in a parent's arms. Head of Alvernia Parentcraft Centre Ms Kang Phaik Gaik says that skin-to-skin contact with a parent does more than just make the baby happy.**

**W**hen you walk, the rhythm of your movements, just like the sound of your voice, is delightfully familiar. Your baby has been moving with you for the last nine months, so it feels good to keep that going by holding a baby in your arms. Even your simplest soothing gestures may be wonderfully recognisable.

"All babies love to be held close because they can hear your familiar heartbeat as well as the smell and the warmth of your body. The closeness allows them to see you,

gives them a sense of security and the feeling of love and comfort. It is a basis of survival for any living thing," said Ms Kang, head of Alvernia Parentcraft Centre.

There is evidence that suggests that skin-to-skin contact helps to facilitate breastfeeding problems and stabilise premature babies.

"Skin-to-skin contact is for both premature and full-term babies. It can take place immediately after birth-undisturbed for at least 1 hour or after the first feed," she explained.

"If it is after birth, the nurse will gently dry your baby with a warm

towel and assist you to sit up at a 30-40° angle before placing your baby directly between your bare breasts, with a blanket draped over the baby's back," Ms Kang said.

It is also referred to as Kangaroo care 'because it is carrying the baby like a kangaroo'. Daddy can also do skin-to-skin. It is the same as cradling the baby in the arm, but close to the chest. "It calms babies and has a positive impact on not only the babies, but also fathers and family relationships," she added. **A**

## SKIN-TO-SKIN BENEFITS

### Comforts

Calms – cries less

### Reassurances

Reduces stress

Maintains warmth

Promotes bonding that lasts a lifetime

Lowers infection

Optimises oxytocin release stimulated by touch and smell

# Milk for Toddlers

## – Which Kind?

Our dietitian, Ms Tan Shi Ling,  
weighs in on this topic.







**M**any parents still feed their 1 to 2 year olds formula milk. According to our dietitian, most parents perceive formula milk to be more nutritious than cow's milk.

"We also came across parents who choose to continue with formula because their children preferred the taste of it. It could also be that parents are not aware that formula milk is optional after the age of one," explained Ms Tan Shi Ling, our resident dietitian.

According to Shi Ling, the main nutrients found in most milk, both formula and 'fresh' milk are protein, calcium, phosphorus, vitamin B2 and D. Both types of milk are usually fortified with a variety of other nutrients although formula milk may contain a wider spectrum of vitamins and minerals.

"A typical can of toddler formula milk usually contains Vitamins A, D, E, K, C, B1, B2, B3, B6, Folic acid, Pantothenic acid, B12, Biotin, Choline. Minerals includes calcium,

phosphorus, magnesium, Iron, copper and zinc."

Toddler formula is popular because it also contains DHA and Choline, she added.

A well balanced diet is the key to ensure your child gets all the nutrients he/she needs, in addition to milk once the child grows past his/her first birthday. According to the Health Promotion Board (HPB), children between six months to two years of age require about 750ml of milk a day.

"Any more than the recommendation may lead to too much caloric intake and may decrease their appetite for the other foods required for growth," Shi Ling explained.

When giving cow's milk, Shi Ling stresses that parents should take full cream milk. "Children under two years old need

extra fat in their diet to support their developing brains. They also have high energy requirement and should not be taking low fat and skimmed milk."

There are however some special circumstances where toddlers will benefit from formula milk.

"Toddlers should continue on formula milk if they have medical conditions like anaemia or iron deficiency, inflammatory bowel disease or liver disease. And if the child is not growing at the expected rate, they should be put on formula milk as well."

As a general guide, Shi Ling advises that the choice of milk to feed is dependent on toddler's needs. Taking a closer look at the nutrition label would be a start to help guide parents on which formula to choose. **A**

# How to Get Junior to Start Reading

Simple steps to take to help junior pick up a book.

Encouraging children to read has become a challenge today, given the distractions of handheld games and videos. As parents, you know too well that reading is important in education and as the child grows into adulthood, to build the ability to communicate to integrate and for business.

Additionally, children who read are found to excel in school and subsequently have rewarding careers, better health and more positive relationships with their peers. According to Anne-Marie Fitzgerald, Executive Director of Reach Out and Read<sup>1</sup> “the first five years of life offer a critical window for brain development and learning”. Therefore, to give your child a head-start in life, inculcate the love for reading in him as early as possible.





Here are 5 steps to kick start your child's adventure into the wide world of books:

## 1 BABY CAN NOW HOLD A LIBRARY MEMBERSHIP

Do you know that your baby can have a library membership? As part of the Early Read campaign jointly mounted by the National Library Board (NLB) and the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), babies born from 2016 onwards are eligible. After registration, simply borrow six books to redeem a free gift pack<sup>2</sup>. The campaign also entitles you to free interactive workshops conducted by experts and reading programmes with your child (from infants to preschoolers), to discover ways to ignite a passion for reading and strengthen parent-child through meaningful activities and play.

## 2 READ ALOUD TOGETHER

Reading aloud to children, or shared book-reading, helps your child recognise letters; understand the relation between print and the spoken word; and “learn how to hold a book, turn the page and

## Designate time daily to read to your children, even when they are babies. Continue to do so even if they are fluent readers to encourage them to be lifelong readers.

start at the beginning”. Shared book-reading also exposes your child to the written language register—which differs from the spoken language, as well as story structures (for example, that they have a beginning, middle and an end) and literacy conventions essential for understanding texts such as grammar and syntax.

## 3 INTEGRATE READING INTO A DAILY ROUTINE, EVEN IF IT IS FOOD LABELS OR MOVIE SUBTITLES

Designate time daily to read to your children, even when they are babies. Continue to do so even if they are fluent readers to encourage them to be lifelong readers.

Reading is also not limited to books. Toddlers at Josiah Montessori learn to read through songs and rhymes, storytelling and dramatisation, phonics, and kinaesthetic movements; you may create shopping lists

together with your child and play word search games at the supermarket; pausing the video player at random points of his favourite movie to get him to read the subtitle is another alternative. These activities foster the idea of reading as enjoyable.

## 4 PICK BOOKS AT THE APPROPRIATE READING LEVEL

For children aged three and below, the NLB recommends books with large colourful pictures, simple storylines, rhymes, repetition and predictable texts whereas picture books with longer texts and detailed illustrations that match interests, address growing-up issues or their day-to-day lives appeal to those aged four to six.

When your child is old enough to dictate stories, select books he is familiar with and are appropriate for his reading level to work on fluency and build confidence. Fear

not, even if they only recognise words from memory.

“Memorisation and reading by imitation is part of learning to read”, said Assistant Professor Loh Chin Ee from the English Language and Literature Academic Group at National Institute of Education (NIE).

## 5 CHOOSE BOOKS WITH CONTENT THAT YOUR CHILD IS INTERESTED IN

Children need to be self-motivated to read. In *The Straits Times* article entitled *How to teach your kids to read*, housewife Shanmugam Rekha shared about her unsuccessful attempts at teaching her elder son to read using phonics; it was only after she purchased an atlas upon realising one of his favourite cartoons involved geography that got him hooked on reading. ■

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<sup>1</sup>Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based, non-profit organisation whose paediatricians promote early literacy and school readiness to 4 million children throughout America

<sup>2</sup>Gift pack contains 3 board books, a Reading is Fun! booklet, A Guide for Reading with Little Ones DVD, Rhymes and Fingerplays for Little Ones and height chart put together in a specially designed tote bag; suitable reading materials for each age group are also suggested on some of these publications. Membership fees apply for non-Singaporeans.

# Should I be Worried About Junior?

As junior grows, we look at common issues that keep parents up at night.

**C**hildren will mature and often times, many issues do fade away on their own. But during their growing years, many will require your guidance and occasional intervention to help them get through the routines of the day. Another salient realisation is that there is a role of objectivity in parenting. It means accepting that your children are individuals and are unique in their own ways; be it temperament or their interaction with others.

## LEARNING DIFFERENTLY

When a child has a learning difficulty, he or she may exhibit signs of being easily distracted even for a short period of time while others can stay relatively focused.





Start to observe and make records of your child for a period of time following feedback from your pre-schooler's teacher. It helps to establish a pattern of behaviour at home and at school and surface the cause of the distraction. However, if your child continues to be inconsistent in school performance even when he is learning in a quiet corner away from all the distraction by age 5-6 years old; then it is advisable to seek professional advice if he/she may be facing some learning difficulties.

Another difficulty is the trouble making the connection between letters and sounds and with spelling or recognising words, even after trying for a period of time. Some also experience difficulty in following directions like distinguishing left from right and in organising written and spoken language. As in learning all new things, it may take months for junior to accomplish recognition. In such cases, patience helps. When you think they know it, then move on to the next set of sequential numbers or alphabets.

## **Consult professionals when the techniques you are using are not getting the results you are hoping for, or if your child's issues are causing him/her great distress and unable to function properly at home or school.**

### **CLUMSY**

Some children may exhibit poor coordination of motor skills such as eye-hand coordination. They may not be able to cut precisely with lines drawn, assembling puzzles or trouble colouring within the lines. It may not be limited to poor motor skills if the child keeps breaking things and has poor balance such as knocking into things and falling down. Have their eyes checked to rule out early myopic related issues. If their eyes are alright, then take heart that motor skills can get better as the child grows; with proper nutrition, exercise and practice.

### **POOR EATING HABITS**

Parents are usually concerned about junior's eating patterns and would often ask if they eat their vegetables or meat in school. It is not surprising as some parents shared that their children tend to push away vegetables or

soup during meal times; with some resorting to extreme choices such as just eating plain rice or just meat. You'll be surprised to know that when the little ones eat with their peers in school, they eat everything off the plate! They role model each other and when they see their friends trying out and eating different kinds of foods, they follow.

Likewise, when eating at home, parents are their role models and when you eat greens and a variety of foods, they are also keen to do so. While it may not be immediate, by maintaining a positive eating environment at meal times, it's only a matter of time before they learn to eat a variety of foods and develop their own unique favourite.

### **BAD DAY AT SCHOOL**

Mummies are normally the worriers and their anxiety compounds when junior shares about having a bad day

in school. Stories such as conflicts between friends, toy snatching, being reprimanded by a teacher or coming back with mozzie bites, bruises or scratches would cause mummies to worry all night, wondering what had happened to their children. Remember to keep your objectivity when finding out from their teacher about such incidents. The main idea is to find solutions and to help your child be comfortable and positive.

It is every parent's desire to give their children the best advantage in the world. However, it can be both worrying and frustrating at the same time when your child is progressing differently or slower than expected. Consult professionals when the techniques you are using are not getting the results you are hoping for, or if your child's issues are causing him/her great distress and unable to function properly at home or school. Just be mindful that your child needs your understanding and support under such circumstances and your presence and love will give your child the motivation to be positive and progress better when they face learning challenges. ■

*Article contributed by  
Josiah Montessori.*





# My Baby is Snoring

Babies are not too young to have sleep disorders. We learn more about the condition from Dr Dawn Teo, a paediatric Ear Nose Throat surgeon.



It is common to hear people talk about snoring as a party joke or use it as a comedic element in movies. But it is no laughing matter. It signals a potentially life-threatening disorder known as obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) and it does not just affect adults, but young children including babies.

"In a child, the most common cause of OSA is enlarged tonsils and adenoids, but sometimes an enlarged tongue, floppy airway or facial skeletal malformations may be responsible," said Dr Teo.

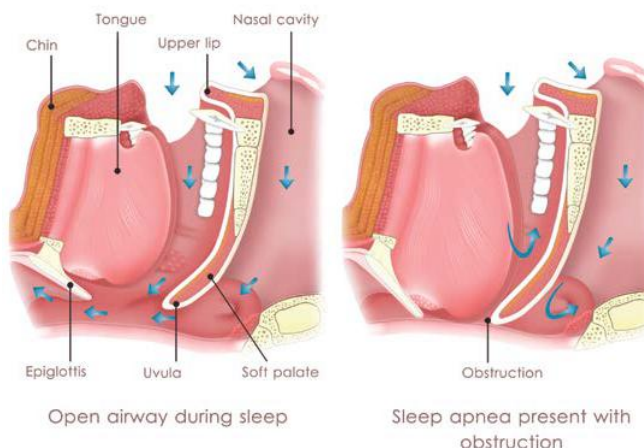
"And in the case of babies, they can present early in life," she added.

Generally babies between four months and a year old sleeps about 12 to 16 hours (including naps in between) in a day. For kids between 1 and 2 years old, a total of 11 to 14 hours is adequate. Listen for noisy breathing which sounds like nasal grunting sounds that may suggest munchkin has OSA and is missing out on healthy, restful sleep.

## AFFECTS DEVELOPMENT

Some causes of paediatric OSA may resolve with age, however, most may not, according to Dr Teo. "Milder cases may improve with age. However, it is not possible to know the severity of sleep apnoea based on symptoms alone. The volume of snoring is not an indicator of the severity of sleep apnoea," she added.

Childhood is a time of growth and development. Like adequate nutrition,



adequate sleep is necessary for a child to grow and develop. Sleep apnoea affects the child's breathing when he sleeps. This results in choking episodes and the lack of oxygen reaching the brain during sleep. This in turn results in interrupted sleep which in the short term, may result in daytime sleepiness and poor school performance.

In cases of severe sleep apnoea, the child may face developmental problems in terms of behaviour and learning, problems concentrating and may become hyperactive. It also predisposes them to a higher risk of cardiac problems in adulthood.

While these symptoms are indicative of sleep apnoea, "the child may need to undergo a sleep study test to assess

the severity of the sleep apnoea," Dr Teo explained.

This test can be performed in a laboratory, where his sleep and breathing parameters will be monitored and recorded continuously during sleep, to look for sleep disruption and evidence of laboured breathing or reduced airflow to the lungs during sleep. There will be sensors placed on your child's head and body, and elastic bands placed around his chest and abdomen, connected by wires to a computer system that records the data collected. There will not be any pain, and most children will be able to fall asleep after they get used to the setup. One caregiver is allowed to stay overnight with the child during the study.

Dr Teo has also treated infants with OSA. "Besides the breathing problem during sleep, other symptoms in babies include poor feeding and growth, and restless sleep."

## APNOEA WITHOUT SNORING

Your child can have apnoea even if they are not snoring. Look out for symptoms like mouth breathing or

heavy breathing, abnormal sleeping positions, restless sleep, day time tiredness, poor concentration or focus.

## RISING NUMBER

Dr Teo sees about 600 children a year with OSA, often associated with enlarged tonsils and adenoids. "With growing awareness, parents are bringing their children in earlier for assessment, which in turn enables us to address the issues earlier. As OSA is also associated with obesity, the rise in overweight kids will result in more patients with OSA."

## TREATMENT

OSA should be diagnosed and treated promptly and multiple research studies have shown that surgery to remove the tonsils and adenoids is an effective first line treatment in these cases, according to Dr Teo. If the child is not able to undergo surgery, sleeping with a positive airway pressure mask is an option.

"It is also important to treat nasal symptoms from nasal allergies to improve results," she added.

For children with obesity as a contributory cause of their OSA, Dr Teo advised that weight loss is an integral aspect. It can be managed at home or in school or you can seek a referral to paediatric specialists for weight management programmes. ■

**Sleep apnoea affects the child's breathing when he sleeps. This results in choking episodes and the lack of oxygen reaching the brain during sleep.**



# AGE BOLDLY AND LOUDLY

**Multi-generation interaction and close social ties with youths enable seniors to cultivate positive psychological perceptions, life satisfaction and positive ageing.**



**L**onger life expectancy, optimal health, and happiness in the later stage of life are the ultimate expectations and aspirations of senior citizens. We read and talk endlessly about the latest superfoods and exercises that will keep us in good shape despite our age. But recent studies have shown that shopping with our grandchild or teaching youths how to bake may be the boost we need for our physical and mental well-being. In this article, we explore these possibilities.

### THE MULTI-GENERATION POWER

Activities that promote frequent exchanges between generations have shown to be effective in improving mental health, perceived health, and emotional well-being among senior citizens, according to a Scottish organisation, Generation Working Together. This organisation examined multiple case studies on the subject and ardently promoted intergenerational activities as a part of active ageing.

The benefits of interactions between generations go beyond breaking the ice between different generations and fostering mutual respect and recognition. For senior citizens, who often feel left out in the increasingly wired

and rapidly changing world, intergenerational exchange provides them with the opportunity for continual social participation and helps to enrich their learning activities.

In Taiwan, a social experiment which focused on building relationships between senior citizens and pre-school, elementary, and middle school students had seen a boost in the elders' self-affirmation and positive perspectives towards ageing awareness. The interaction commonly involved senior citizens sharing life experiences and engaging students through their cultural heritage, such as by teaching folk arts and traditional songs, and providing knowledge about local cultures.

Closer to home, Channel NewsAsia conducted a similar social experiment, pairing five seniors with teenagers for over ten weeks, and documented their interactions in their new documentary "Back to School". Before embarking on the project both generations went through psychometric tests to assess their self-esteem and emotions. The

seniors' physical fitness, memory, and mental dexterity were also tested. At the end of the 10 weeks, they were re-assessed to see if there were any changes.

One of the participants was an 83-year-old man called Bill Teoh. He was not too thrilled to spend time with 14-year-old Kieyron Maldini. A retired member of the police force, and owner of Singapore's oldest and biggest comic book store, Bill could not understand how youths today could spend so much time on their phones or play computer games. But Kieyron was unfazed. The bubbly teenager taught Bill how to play the games and before long, we saw Bill asking Kieyron to play another round and "bring Batman back".

While the youths challenged the elders to try new things, the elders brought to the table their decade-long experience and life lessons to help the youths cope with their struggles. In the documentary, we followed the exchanges between the chirpy and energetic 79-year-old Nonie Chew and reserved 15-year-old Foo Jun Hao. Nonie's

kindness and persistence allowed her to leap over the generation gap to be Jun Hao's morale booster and confidante.

At the end of 10 weeks, Billy saw an 18 per cent increase in his mental flexibility and walking speed, while Nonie saw a 20 per cent increase in mental flexibility and 27 per cent increase in endurance.

These results corroborate previous findings, which indicated that intergenerational learning helps to cultivate positive psychological perception, life satisfaction, and successful ageing, despite the negative perspective that intergenerational learning cannot prevent physiological degeneration.

The documentary has also made apparent what the studies have been echoing for years: we need to change our mindset about ageing. Instead of looking at old age as a burden and as the end of the "good days", we should take an asset-based view. Seniors possess the knowledge and experience valuable to society and more should be done to engage them.



## AGEING WELL STARTS FROM WITHIN: NUTRITION

Equally important as intellectual and emotional engagement is nutrition. New studies in recent years have shown that the right diet and nutrition may reduce risk of age-related diseases and promote healthy ageing. We are what we eat, and it shows as we age. But what does it mean to eat well?

To put it simply, eating well in the later stage of life comprises eating with balance and eating for protection.

Eating with balance – As we age, our metabolism will slow down and as we become less mobile, we will use less energy. If we keep eating the same amount of food, our calorie intake will become higher, which could lead to various health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. So, we should moderate our portions and go for low-calorie, nutrient-dense food, such as nuts, lean protein like salmon, fruits, and vegetables.

Avoid saturated fat and food containing trans-fat which are

commonly found in dairy products, animal fat, fried food and products made with vegetable shortening and hydrogenated oils found in pastries.

Eating for protection—Protect your cells and bones by taking in food rich in antioxidants and calcium. The scaffolding in our bones may be weakened with age and therefore calcium-rich foods should be a staple in our diet. Fish with edible bones, leafy green vegetables, and soybean milk are among the foods known for their high calcium content.

Antioxidants are necessary to fight free radical molecules that could damage body cells and accelerate ageing. Remember to include a variety of fruits and vegetables (with at least two servings per day), and cultivate a preference for produce with bright colours as they are richer in antioxidants.

## KEEP MOVING

Old age is no excuse to throw in our towels and hang up our sneakers. Physical activities

are good for everyone regardless of age. The Health Promotion Board recommends that people over 50 do strength and balance exercises at least twice a week, in addition to 150 minutes of moderately intense physical activity. However, we should be mindful of our health condition and regular medications when choosing the type of exercise. If you have not been regularly exercising, it is best to go for health screening and consult health professionals before starting any exercise regime.

There are four types of exercises: endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility.

Endurance helps to keep our lungs, heart, and circulatory system healthy. Building our endurance will improve our stamina and help us carry out our everyday activities. Brisk walking, jogging, and dancing are among the activities that can improve our endurance. Endurance exercises are normally of low intensity, but performed in longer duration. So, drink plenty of fluids even when we do not feel thirsty. This is because we are more prone to dehydration as we age.

Strength exercises will make our muscles stronger. A couple of strength exercises a week will make a whole world of difference when we carry groceries or climb up the stairs. Lifting weights, using resistance bands, or exercising with our own body weight are good exercises to build strength. These exercises may look intimidating and spark concerns that we will have aches and pains, but exercising can help us manage pain and improve our strength and self-confidence. Many older people find that regular exercises not only halt the decline in strength and vitality, but improve it. The key is to begin with gentle activities and build up from there.

One of the biggest fears of old age is falling down. This is where balance and flexibility exercises could be useful. Yoga helps to stretch our muscles and keep us limber. Tai Chi







**While intergenerational exchange helps open up opportunities for seniors to find their place in society, and food and exercise help maintain our health, ultimately, it is we who determine what we can or cannot do.**

and heel-to-toe walk are two low intensity activities that are perfect for those who just started exercising.

Regular physical activity helps us stay healthy and independent longer. Not to mention, the slew of health benefits such as lowering the risk of Alzheimer's and dementia, heart disease and high blood pressure, on top of enhancing our mood.

## **OLDER AND BOLDER**

Of course, the most important thing to do to keep up with youths is to feel young and according to studies, we can actually find the elixir within.

Dr Carol Tan, a geriatrician who oversaw a Channel NewsAsia programme called "Turn Back the Clock", has seen how a new mindset can lead to better health. The programme put five Singaporeans aged 74 to 78 in a house that recreates the 1970s, from the furniture, television, room décor, down to the newspapers. The aim was to create an environment that reconnected them with their younger and fitter selves. According to Dr Tan, "The experiment is unique as a health programme in that it did not focus on the pills, surgery, hospitals or clinics. It converged on

the people."

This mind-over-body approach casted doubt among health professionals initially, including Dr Tan herself, but the result of the social experiment was fruitful. Take Madam Asmah Laili, for example, who used to host one of Singapore's most popular Malay cooking programmes, but due to mobility issue, she has long hung up her apron.

She began to rely on a walking stick as she grew older. In the experiment, she was asked to prepare dessert for her former colleagues and as she

busied herself with the preparations, she forgot about her walking stick. The sense of meaningful purpose allowed her to surpass her pre-conceived limits.

Dr Tan said that sometimes, it is the "prejudice they put on themselves – that I'm old already and I've done enough already" that could weigh down on seniors' mental health and impede them from active ageing.

So, to avoid our mind and spirit from slipping into that "resting mode", there are a number of things that we can do: Find a way to make old things new. Try out new board games, move to more challenging puzzles or crosswords to keep the sense of purpose and excitement alive. We can also try something new. It could be as challenging as picking up a new language or computer skill, or changing our hairstyle.

While intergenerational exchange helps open up opportunities for seniors to find their place in society, and food and exercise help maintain our health, ultimately, it is we who determine what we can or cannot do. **A**

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# Diets That Won't Bite Stroke Patients

Healthy heart beats start with healthy bites. While there is no ideal meal plan for stroke patients, there are certainly ways to prevent recurring strokes through controlled and balanced diets. We find out more from **Ms Janice Chong**, dietitian.





## A diet conditions us to practise portion control which can lead to weight loss or, at the very least, improved weight management.

### HEALTHY DIET AFTER A STROKE

To prevent a stroke from striking, we must look at the factors that could trigger a stroke and customise our diets to tackle them. High blood pressure and excess weight are two known culprits that could cause strokes.

For this reason, dietary guidelines by the American Heart Association (AHA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) advocate diets which are high in vegetables, fruits, and wholegrains, and low in sodium, sweets, and red meats.

We may be tempted to find the best food for recovering stroke patients to save our time from making mental notes on what to eat and what not to eat. But, health professionals have stressed that there is no one food that can fulfill all our nutritional requirements. Instead, health practitioners recommend consuming a variety of food every day.

Ensure that you eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Dietary patterns with high intake of fruits and vegetables have been linked with a lower risk of developing cardiovascular

disease, stroke, and hypertension.

Wholegrains can provide complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and fibre that can decrease the risk of heart disease. Limiting daily salt intake and saturated fats is also crucial. The AHA recommends curbing sodium intake to no more than 2,300mg a day and to refrain from consuming full-fat dairy products, fatty meats, and tropical oils. Fill your plates with low-fat dairy products, fish, legumes, poultry, and lean meats instead.

But, adopting a healthy eating habit does not mean that you have to pass on the more 'sinful' foods entirely. There is still room for occasional indulgences since a healthy dietary practice is based on an individual's overall pattern of food consumption over an extended period of time and not on the intake of a single meal.

Meal plans for stroke patients should be individualised based on individual calorie requirements and cultural food preferences.

### PLANNING STROKE DIETS

Dietary guidelines for stroke patients greatly overlap with the standard healthy eating recommendation. However, in planning diets

for stroke patients, we must pay extra attention to tailoring the diet plan to a patient's pre-existing conditions.

People with high blood pressure should limit the amount of salt to less than one teaspoon of salt per day. Instead, use herbs and spices for flavouring. Those with high blood cholesterol or hardening of the arteries should limit food containing high levels of fat especially saturated fats and trans-fat.

Try grilling your food instead of frying it with butter or oil. We should also be more diligent in limiting processed and snack foods, as well as reading food labels for sodium and saturated-fat content.

Extra effort in keeping up with the dietary guideline is warranted as according to a population-based study published in July 2016, patients who have had a stroke have a three-fold increased risk of a recurrent stroke and a nearly two-fold increased risk of dementia within one year of their stroke compared with patients who have never had a stroke.

Major practice guidelines from the NIH and AHA have confirmed that aggressive risk factor management, such as reducing smoking, controlling blood pressure, and managing weight, improves survival

and reduces recurrent events.

### WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER FOLLOWING THE DIETS

Diets cannot reverse the effect of genetic predisposition to stroke or increased susceptibility due to age. But, by following a strict diet, we can better control the risk factors that could trigger a stroke.

A diet conditions us to practise portion control which can lead to weight loss or, at the very least, improved weight management. Limiting food high in sodium, saturated fats and trans-fat can improve blood pressure and lipid profile. Increasing fibre intake can alleviate constipation and reduce cholesterol.

So, apart from reducing the risk of getting a stroke, such diets can be beneficial for our overall health which makes a stroke diet suitable for everyone of all ages. There is also no limit to the period a person can stay on a stroke diet.

All family members, with or without pre-existing conditions, can join the diet as a part of living a healthy lifestyle and as a form of moral support for stroke patients. ■

# Getting Through the 12 Days of Christmas and Beyond...

**Ms Sarah Sinaram, Nutrition and Dietetics Manager offers the 12 tips to help preempt any of the looming stress and to handle the holidays in a healthy way.**

**T**is the season and the long holidays to let loose, party hearty and enjoy tantalising gastronomic selections of food: scrumptious gourmet buffets and seemingly endless servings of chocolates and wines. It isn't usually a time when

anyone worries about their health.

The worry starts to set in after January 1st when most of the parties are over where you realise you look a bit haggard and tired from plenty of late nights and booze; not to mention spotting a bulging waistline in the mirror!



# 1

## WATCH THE GRAVY

Turkey is considered a red meat because it has a slightly higher fat composition than that of chicken. The real killer, however, is the gravy. It can hide as much as 70 calories in a single tablespoon – the equivalent of eating one whole apple. Limit intake of gravies and sauces to 1-2 tablespoons as these contain hidden fats and may be high in calories.



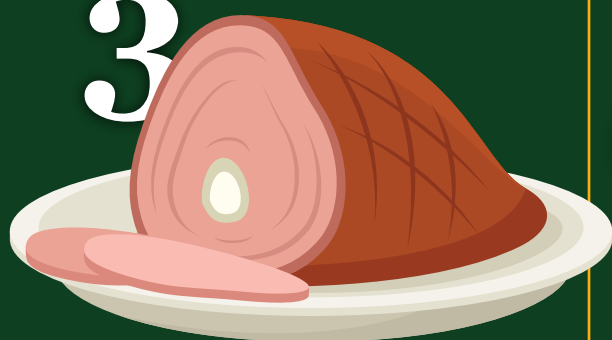
# 2

## INCLUDE PROTEIN IN YOUR CHRISTMAS MEAL

Foods high in protein seem to make us feel fuller than high carbohydrate foods, so include some protein at your Christmas meal to help keep you satisfied. Foods high in protein include meats such as skinless chicken, lean pork, fish, eggs, beans and pulses.



3



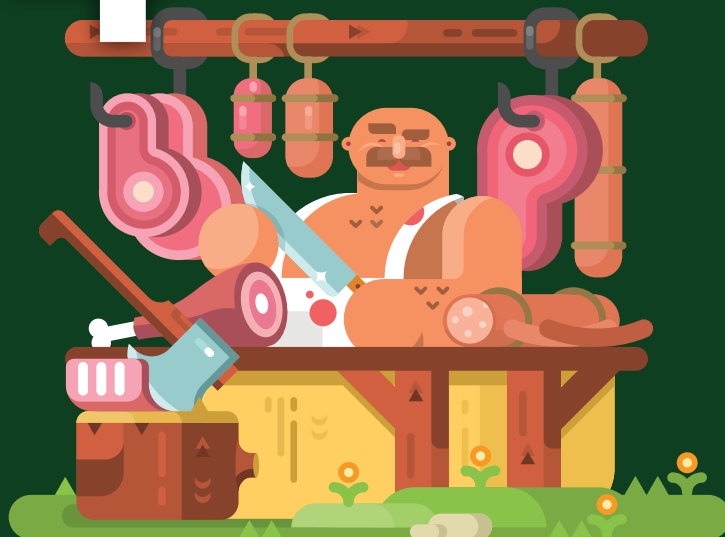
### STICK TO NO MORE TWO SLICES OF GLAZED HAM

There's so much to love about delicious pre-smoked ham and each slice has only 55 calories. The thing to take note of this dish, though, is the fat and sodium that comes with it. So stick to just one to two slices, and you should be fine.

4

### CHOOSE LEAN CUTS OF MEAT

If you are watching your weight, opt for lower fat versions, using leaner cuts of meat, cutting off visible fat and avoiding the skin on poultry as this will help reduce your caloric intake.



5



### REMEMBER THE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Foods that are high in dietary fibre may also enhance feelings of fullness so try to include plenty of high-fibre foods in your meal such as vegetables and have fruits for dessert if they are available.

### MIX OF WATER AND JUICE

As an alternative, try sparkling water with splash of cranberry juice and a slice of orange during dinner. Also, drink water after your meal (about 15 minutes after). Water aids digestion of food and helps to flush toxins out of your system. It also helps your skin stay bright and fresh and less prone to breakouts and dullness. Throughout the whole day before your big party in the evening, remember to drink enough plain water to stay hydrated.



6

### MODERATE ALCOHOL INTAKE

Alcohol seems to stimulate appetite in the short-term and therefore drinking alcohol is likely to encourage us to eat more. Alcoholic beverages can make you forget about your intentions to eat healthily by making you lose your inhibitions. Alcoholic drinks are also calorific, so you should cut down on alcohol consumption if you are trying to control your weight.

7





### AVOID A HANGOVER

Avoid consuming alcohol on an empty stomach. Before you go out, have a meal. The food will help slow down the body's absorption of alcohol. Drink water in between each alcoholic drink and have a glass of water before you sleep. If possible, keep a glass of water by the bed to sip if you wake up thirsty during the night.



### DO MORE EXERCISE AFTER ENJOYING A HEAVY FESTIVE MEAL

Exercise is a great way to burn those extra calories you may be taking in this time of the year, keep your energy in balance and waistline in check. Simply walk more, park your car some distance away from your destination or just use the stairs!



### PRACTISE PORTION CONTROL

While most people resort to detox diets after a food binge, there is little evidence that they actually help to eliminate toxins from your body. In healthy individuals, the kidneys and liver are effective at filtering and eliminating most ingested toxins. Adopt healthy eating immediately after a food binge, cut out processed foods and practise portion control during meal times. Having small, frequent meals will also help ensure you are full throughout the day.



### REMAIN ACTIVE

It does not have to be a regiment of hitting the gym for a fixed duration or days of exercise. You can still have a fitness routine whenever possible and it could be as simple as heading down to the supermarket, walking around the store, carrying bags and pushing a trolley. It is still a reasonable workout without you realising it. Plus, there are always post-Christmas sales and offers; a perfect time to get out and shop.

### BE GENTLE ON YOURSELF

After all, it is a holiday and there is a lot to celebrate and talk about with friends and family. Plus these are the foods that you normally wouldn't eat all year round. So if you feel like having the creamy log cake or a bit of eggnog or bread pudding – have it. Just do so in moderation and remember to keep your energy in balance for the New Year ahead. **A**





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