

The nation's largest community nutrition programme, Nutrition Month Malaysia, targets chronic diseases.

Creating healthier families

NUTRITION Month Malaysia (NMM) is now a household name in Malaysia. The NMM Programme was first introduced in 2002 by three professional bodies – the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM), the Malaysian Dietitians' Association (MDA) and the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO).

These three professional bodies made a decision to implement a long-term nationwide programme that will further strengthen the Health Ministry's nationwide healthy lifestyle programmes.

This year is an especially significant year for NMM as it celebrates its 10th anniversary. Yes, it has been 10 years since the launch of NMM in 2002 and they have been observing and conducting NMM activities in April every year since then.

Dr Tee E Siong, president of NSM and chairman of the NMM's national steering committee, shares his thoughts on how NMM came about and their progress over the years.

Could you tell us what motivated these three NGOs to organise NMM?

Since its independence, Malaysia has undergone remarkable socio-economic development, which has also led to significant changes to health and nutrition issues in the country.

On the one hand, there has been a significant decline in problems. However, with the increase in affluence, there has been dramatic changes to the lifestyles of Malaysians with an equally negative impact to health – this includes sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits.

Malaysians are now consuming foods that are high in fats and sugar, and tend to overeat, especially with the increasing number of eateries, some of which operate 24-hours!

As a result of these changes in lifestyle, there has been a steady rise in diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes, high blood cholesterol, heart diseases and cancers. Sadly, these diseases have reached alarming proportions in Malaysia.

In cognisance of this nutrition scenario, the three professional bodies, NSM, MDA and



MASO initiated the Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) programme in 2002 to support and complement the Government's efforts in promoting a healthy lifestyle to combat the rising trend of diet-related chronic diseases.

NMM aims to disseminate appropriate and unbiased nutrition information to the public in order to create greater awareness on healthy eating and active living.

It aims to help them understand how simple it is to incorporate healthy eating and physical

activities as part of their lifestyle.

What are some of NMM's past achievements?

The NMM programme has adopted a multi-pronged approach to promote healthy eating and active living to Malaysians all over the nation. We have used various channels, from the media to organising events.

In the first phase of Nutrition Month (2002-2007), NMM organised only a few activities,

Ten good years: Into its 10th year, the Nutrition Month Malaysia programme continues to disseminate appropriate and unbiased nutrition information to the public in order to create greater awareness on healthy eating and active living.

such as press articles, seminars and roadshows at work places.

Starting from 2008, NMM collaborated with various companies from the private sector to obtain more funds, which in turn has enabled NMM to organise bigger activities targeted at a wider audience.

Since then, we have organised five major family carnivals in shopping malls and exhibition centres to help families learn about nutrition the fun way; conducted over 150 nutrition