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## New nutrition labelling system in the works

I REFER to Tuesday's letter, 'Healthy Foods Flying off Shelves'. The Singapore Heart Foundation (SHF) is heartened to see more Singaporeans starting to choose healthy food.

The SHF has been and will continue to encourage the public to adopt a healthy lifestyle by having a balanced diet, regular exercise and regular health screenings. Some of our programmes include supermarket tours where nutritionists/dietitians help grocery shoppers to identify healthy food and to read the labels on the packaging to understand the nutritional value of the contents.

We are currently pilot testing the Traffic Light System in a primary school. Under this system, the food items sold in the canteen are labelled green, red or amber.

Green signifies that the food is healthiest based on its nutritional value and red signifies the least healthy. Students are encouraged to go for the healthier options.

Meanwhile, the Healthier Choice logo - developed by the SHF and Ministry of Health and handed over to the then newly formed Health Promotion Board (HPB) - assists members of the public to identify healthier foods when they shop at supermarkets. This scheme has proven to be successful. The SHF believes it is now timely to take this initiative to the next level.

This week, the European Heart Network, European Consumers' Organisation and the European Public Health Alliance jointly issued a call for mandatory nutrition labelling for both 'front and back of pack' in food packaging.

A multi-colour coding has been proposed on the front of the pack, with red, yellow (amber) and green codes, indicating high, medium and low levels of not more than four nutrients such as energy, saturated (including trans) fat, salt equivalents and added sugars.

This is a more refined Traffic Light System which can be done in such a way that consumers can understand it quickly and easily.

The SHF would like to work with other like-minded organisations to further develop this colour coding concept to help consumers assess the 'healthiness' of individual products in the context of their overall diet and compare nutrient levels in different products quickly and easily.

This will place Singapore on par with the best nutritional practices in Europe and give Singaporeans a huge leg-up in their ability to identify and choose healthier food across all categories of foods.

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