

Cut salt intake early to keep silent killer away

THE Singapore Heart Foundation and Singapore Hypertension Society joined the rest of the world in commemorating World Hypertension Day on Sunday and urge everyone to regularly check their blood pressure.

Like most other countries around the world, cardiovascular disease, in particular coronary heart disease and stroke, as well as kidney failure are leading causes of death and disability in Singapore.

Hypertension, which according to the National Health Survey of 2004 affects a quarter of all Singaporeans between the ages of 30 and 69 years, is a major risk factor for these serious diseases.

A high salt intake is an important cause of hypertension. The recommended limit of salt intake is 2,000mg of sodium a day (equivalent to a teaspoon of salt). In Singapore, a National Nutrition Survey conducted in 1998 revealed that nine out of 10 Singaporeans exceeded this recommendation. The average Singaporean takes about 3,500mg of sodium a day.

The Singapore Heart Foundation and Singapore Hypertension Society urge all residents in Singapore to reduce their salt intake to reduce their risk of hypertension and hypertension-related diseases.

We recognise that reducing salt intake is a challenge for most Singaporeans, especially those who often eat out and consume large amounts of processed food. Also, salt and sauces such as soya sauce, ketchup and chilli sauce are often added in the preparation of food and at the table.

We recognise these challenges, but believe that salt is an acquired taste and that taste buds can be reconditioned to reduce salt intake, particularly if we start young and encourage our children to choose healthier, less salty food. Parents can be models for their children by checking food labels carefully and not buying very salty foods for their children.

Cooks and chefs can demonstrate their creativity with less salty but equally tasty dishes. Restaurants can discourage the common practice of automatically providing saucers of soya sauce unless asked for. Manufacturers can lower the amount of salt they put into children's foods and provide clear salt labelling to help parents make informed choices.

Hypertension is a silent killer. You can reduce your risk of becoming a victim by reducing your salt intake. Get your blood pressure checked regularly and if it is high, consult your doctor and get it treated.

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