

**Having two glasses of milk daily is an essential part of a healthy diet, writes Meena Sreenivasan**



MILK has always been regarded as one of the most complete of foods, containing almost all the important nutrients for optimal growth. But research shows that there is low milk consumption among Malaysians, in both adults and children.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia School of Healthcare Sciences chair and honorary secretary of Nutrition Society of Malaysia Professor Norimah A. Karim says Malaysians are consuming the desired food groups as recommended by the Malaysian Dietary Guideline (MDG) Food Pyramid, except milk.

“Malaysians are not drinking enough milk. In the Malaysian Adults Nutrition Survey conducted in 2003, milk or dairy products consumption among Malaysians is said to be only 0.14 serving per day which is equivalent to one fifth of a glass of milk. This is way below the suggested recommendation of one to two glasses per day,” she adds.

#### **NOT MILK DRINKERS**

Malaysians, in general, she says, are a non-milk drinking population and many mistakenly believe that milk is only for young children. Often, milk is left out as part of their daily diet.

They tend to neglect the importance of milk as they grow older and opt for sugar-sweetened beverages such as tea, coffee and cordials.

Considering the many reports of chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity plaguing adults and even children these days, leading a healthier lifestyle that includes going easy on sugar seems to be one of the logical options, she adds.

Incorporating a healthy diet into family culture will naturally instill good eating habits among children.

“Parents, particularly mothers, must teach children about good nutritious food and healthy options so that they will be able to choose for themselves in the future. Subconsciously,

children will tend to pick this up and eventually they will build a healthy eating habit, like that of drinking two glasses of milk every day,” she says.

In the MDG 2010, milk and milk products are recommended for consumption for those above two years of age and these foods are placed at level three of the food pyramid, at the same level as meat, poultry, fish and eggs, indicating their importance.

## GOOD FOOD

“We usually associate milk with calcium.” While milk is one of the most essential foods that promote bone and teeth development, we must not forget that this purest form of liquid also comes with a rich source of essential nutrients such as magnesium (calcium absorption), vitamin D (calcium and phosphorus absorption), vitamin A (for healthy eyes and to keep skin and mucous membrane cells healthy) and protein (growth of muscle and tissues).

Milk also plays an important role in making up for missing nutrients or as a substitute for food that is nutritious but lacking taste, especially with fussy eaters.

“It doesn’t mean the end of the world if you don’t like the taste or smell of milk. You can have cheese, yoghurt, ice cream, custard, pudding or milkshakes, as long as it is milk-based. For example, one slice of cheese is equivalent to one glass of milk.

## SERVING OPTIONS

“We have to start planting the habit of drinking two glasses of milk a day, early. Serve milk to your child at breakfast and before bedtime, so that you’ll be assured that he is getting the right nutrition for optimum growth,” she says.

Meanwhile, associate professor Dr Poh Bee Koon, head of Nutritional Sciences Programme at UKM, says that Malaysians are mostly lactose intolerant.

“We don’t know the percentage among children but among adults, almost 97 per cent are lactose intolerant. If these people still want to drink milk, I suggest drinking it in smaller doses as bacteria in intestines can digest a little bit of lactose. Take a quarter glass a day for a week and slowly increase it to half a glass the following week. After a month, you can increase it to one glass a day. If you really cannot take two glasses a day, work your way up to half a glass twice daily,” she adds.

## DRINK UP

1. Start your day with milk by adding it to morning cereal or oatmeal.
2. Drink milk as a snack since it gives a balance of quality protein and carbohydrates.
3. Change your coffee habit and have a cafe au lait instead of a latte since the former uses more milk.
4. Take the edge off your hunger before a party. Have a glass of low-fat or fat-free milk.
5. Drink milk for dessert.
6. Milk is an excellent post-exercise beverage to re-energise your body.
7. Have milk before bedtime. A good bedtime routine can help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep better.

