

# Lack of support for diabetics

A study finds that not many people are willing to change their lifestyles to help support a diabetic family member.

WOULD you be willing to change your diet and exercise more to support a family member with diabetes?

There is no doubt that these two items are difficult to accomplish, especially when our environment seems to promote an unhealthy food culture and a sedentary lifestyle.

However, both these lifestyle changes are crucial in helping to control this chronic disease, as medicine alone will not help to stave off the complications of uncontrolled high blood sugar (glucose), like heart or cardiovascular disease, eye damage (retinopathy), nerve damage (neuropathy), kidney damage (nephropathy) and chronic ulcers leading to amputation, among others.

But, according to a study commissioned by regional insurance provider Sun Life Financial Asia, only one in two (50%) Malaysian respondents were willing to change their diet to support a family member living with diabetes, while only about one in three (32%) were willing to exercise to support such a family member.

These numbers are despite the finding that 63% and 53% of Malaysians are aware that high-carbohydrate diets and lack of exercise respectively are high-risk factors for diabetes.

The study, which had 3,806 respondents from Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, also found that although 93% of Malaysians were aware of the importance of diabetes screening, only 27% had actually been screened.

Says Sun Life Malaysia chief executive officer and president/country head Raymond Lew: "These are certainly worrying statistics; as the number of diabetes cases in Malaysia continues to climb, it is imperative that we as a nation take more proactive and pre-emptive steps to stem the rising tide of diabetes."

He adds: "As a country, Malaysia must increase efforts and investment into encouraging and empowering its people to be more proactive and to get personal screenings done more regularly."

"Early detection and constant monitoring, coupled with important lifestyle changes, all play a vital role in halting the rise of diabetes."

"This also increases the prospects of having access to more affordable (insurance) protection when compared to those with such health issues."

Sun Life Financial Asia recommends a five-pronged approach to curbing diabetes in its *Diabetes in Asia: Empowering Com-*



Although most Malaysians know the importance of getting screened for diabetes, only 27%, like the woman in this filepic, have actually gotten screened.

unities to Lead Healthier Lives report, which also contains the study results.

They are:

- Incentivising people to stay active through fitness apps that offer rewards.

Gamification and rewards can motivate people to stay active.

- Creating public spaces in urban environments for exercise.

By creating parks, cycle paths and pavements in urban environments, families and individuals will find it easier to exercise together.

- Organising family-oriented fitness clubs and events, like fun runs.

Communities can organise local family-oriented fitness clubs and events.

Encouraging families and friends to exercise together means that they are more likely to stay active in the long run.

- Encouraging local shops to stock wholegrain or brown rice, instead of white rice.

White rice constitutes up to 60% of the glycaemic load among the Chinese popula-

tion and is associated with an increased risk of diabetes.

By providing shoppers with healthier options, including wholegrain and brown rice, families and individuals will be able to reduce their carbohydrate or sugar intake.

- Putting limits on the levels of added salt in pre-packaged, processed and fast foods.

The mean intake of salt per day in South-East Asia varies from 8 grammes per day to 13 grammes per day, much higher than recommended.

Providing low salt alternatives to pre-packaged, processed and fast foods makes it easier for individuals and families to cut down their salt intake.

At the national level, regulations limiting the levels of added salt to such foods can be implemented by the Government.

At the community level, supporting local markets, restaurants and purveyors of healthy foods, provides healthier options for families and individuals.

This article is courtesy of Sun Life Malaysia.