

Non-Communicable Diseases Watch

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衛生防護中心
Centre for Health Protection



衛生署
Department of Health

Stay Home and Be Healthy

Key Messages

- ※ In the wake of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Government of Hong Kong SAR strongly urges the general public to go out less and reduce social activities and maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible. To stay physically and mentally fit while staying at home, it is utmost important to eat healthily and be physically active.
- ※ Members of the public should eat according to the “Healthy Eating Food Pyramid” guide and observe the basic principles of healthy eating: reduce sodium/salt intake, limit sugars consumption, limit fats intake, eat more fruit and vegetables, consume enough dietary fibre, drink enough water and avoid alcohol.
- ※ For optimal health, WHO recommends adults to engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or equivalent amount per week and do muscle-strengthening activities involving major muscle groups on two or more days a week. Children and adolescents aged 5–17 should do at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily and include activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least 3 times per week. While at home, members of the public are encouraged to do home-based exercises and household chores; engage in some physical activities while watching television or talking on the phone; break up long periods of sitting and do leg raise or ankle rotation exercise as often as possible while sitting; be aware of screen time, take regular breaks from on-screen activities, and be sure to have a balance of activities in daily life.
- ※ The Department of Health is committed to protecting public health and will continue to organise systematic communication campaigns to increase health literacy of the general public. To reduce the risk of non-communicable and communicable diseases, members of the public are urged to lead a healthy lifestyle, observe good personal and environmental hygiene, and follow Government’s health advice. For more information about the infection situation and relevant health notice and advice, please visit www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html.



同心抗疫 Together,
We Fight the Virus!

Stay Home and Be Healthy

In the wake of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Government of Hong Kong SAR strongly urges the general public to go out less and reduce social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings, and maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible. When staying home for a prolonged period due to various reasons e.g. work from home, learning at home, home quarantine etc., some individuals may feel bored, lonely or even anxious and then resort to frequent snacking with energy-dense processed foods or sugar-rich beverages, spending hours sitting and watching television or videos, indulging in Internet activities or playing on-line games. After a week or two, they are very likely to have unhealthy weight gain as consequences of self-indulgence, overeating and physical inactivity. Research has clearly showed that overweight and obesity is linked to increased risk of many non-communicable diseases, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers such as colorectal cancer and breast cancer. Prolonged sitting can also compromise metabolic health, cause deep vein thrombosis and lead to muscle stiffness or back pain. To stay physically and mentally fit while staying at home, it is utmost important to eat healthily and be physically active.

Eating Healthily

A healthy diet is vital to physical health, mental health and the immune system. During the prolonged staying at home in this pandemic, there is increased chance of consumption of processed foods, which tend to be high in fats, sugars and salts. Therefore, people should eat according to the “Healthy Eating Food Pyramid” guide (Figure 1). The following basic principles of healthy eating^{1,2} should be observed —

Reduce Sodium/Salt Intake

Excess sodium consumption is irrefutably linked to high blood pressure. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation, healthy adults should consume less than 2 grams of sodium (or 5 grams of salt) per day; children should consume less sodium than adults.¹ To cut down the amount of salt intake via ingestion, members of the public

could choose lean fresh or frozen meat, fish and seafood rather than processed meat such as sausages, ham and luncheon meat; use garlic, onion, fruit juice, pepper, herbs and spices instead of salt, soy sauce or condiments to enhance the flavour of the dishes when cooking; and blanch the canned vegetables before cooking to reduce salt content.

Limit Sugars Consumption

Excessive sugars consumption can lead to obesity which increases individual risk of developing type 2 diabetes as well as cardiovascular diseases.³ For both adults and children, WHO strongly recommends that daily consumption of free sugars should be less than 10% of total energy intake. A reduction to less than 5% of total energy intake would provide additional health benefits.¹ To reduce sugar intake, members of the public could avoid adding extra sugars to foods and beverages; choose water as the main drink; have fresh fruit as dessert; or choose low-sugar or diet drinks if prefer something sweet to drink.

Limit Fats Intake

Excessive consumption or consuming wrong type of fats would negatively affect health. Too much saturated fats in the diet can lead to cardiovascular diseases and other health problems. Trans fats (which are frequently found in baked foods, fried foods and pre-packaged snack foods) have no known health benefits and they increase the risk of developing heart diseases and stroke.⁴ For adults, WHO recommends less than 30% of total energy intake from fats. While consumption of saturated fats should limit to less than 10% of total energy intake, total consumption of trans fats should be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake.¹ To reduce fats intake, members of the public could choose lean cuts of meat, such as pork tenderloin, beef sirloin, skinless poultry; choose low-fat cooking methods e.g. steaming, blanching, blanching in broth, stir-frying with less oil and non-stick cookware etc.; and read food labels and choose products with the lowest amounts of total fats and trans fats, such as low-fat or skimmed dairy products.

Figure 1: Healthy Eating Food Pyramid in Hong Kong (for Adults)



Note: For the Healthy Eating Food Pyramids for children, adolescents and elderly, please visit the Change for Health website at www.change4health.gov.hk/en/healthy_diet/guidelines/food_pyramid/index.html

Eat More Fruit and Vegetables

A diet rich in fruit and vegetables can prevent body weight gain, lower the risk of obesity and related chronic diseases. In addition, fruit and vegetables contain high levels of phytochemicals and antioxidants that have anti-inflammatory effects.⁵ WHO recommends at least 400 grams (5 servings) of fruit and vegetables per day.¹ To increase fruit intake, members of the public could serve fruit as snack. Orange, apple and dragon fruit that are relatively nonperishable are good choices. To increase vegetable intake, add vegetables to dishes, e.g. stir-fry broccoli with beef or scramble egg with tomato; and add vegetables and beans when cooking soups.

Consume Enough Dietary Fibre

Fibre contributes to a healthy digestive system and offers a prolonged feeling of fullness which helps prevent overeating. To consume more fibre, members of the public could choose wholegrain products, such as brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat noodles, wholemeal bread and oat; include mushrooms, jelly ear, beans and legumes (such as red kidney beans and string beans) in salad and hot dishes; eat whole fruit and vegetables instead of fruit and vegetable juices; enjoy fruit (such as apple and pear) with skin whenever possible.

Drink Enough Water

To be healthy, it is important to have adequate intake of water from food and beverages every day. For quenching thirst, plain water is the best choice. To enhance its taste, slices of fruits (e.g. lemon, lime, strawberry etc.) or herbs (e.g. mint, lemongrass etc.) may be added. However, members of the public should avoid drinking large amount of coffee, strong tea or other caffeinated drinks that can affect sleep.

Avoid Alcohol

Drinking alcoholic beverages has both immediate and long-term effects on your health. Alcohol weakens the immune system, undermining the body's ability to fight off infectious diseases, including COVID-19.² As a psychoactive substance, alcohol drinking can increase or intensify symptoms of

depression, anxiety or panic. Alcohol is also extremely calorific, second only to fat. Alcohol can provide energy with 7 kilocalories per gram that could contribute to weight gain. For example, one can of beer with 330 ml and 5% alcohol by volume has about 150 calories. More importantly, members of the public should not resort to alcohol drinking as a way to beat boredom or stress, and misbelieve that alcohol drinking can protect them against COVID-19.

Staying Physically Active

Physical activity is good for both physical and mental health. It not only prevents weight gain and reduces the risk of various obesity-related diseases, but also boosts immunity and helps reduce stress and anxiety.⁶⁻⁸ For optimal health, WHO recommends adults to engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or equivalent amount per week and do muscle-strengthening activities involving major muscle groups on two or more days a week. Children and adolescents aged 5–17 should do at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily and include activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least 3 times per week.⁶ In addition to physical activity participation, members of the public are also advised to limit total sitting time and simultaneously break up the time spending sitting. As opposed to sitting, research showed that simply standing up would engage muscles and enable body metabolise fat in a healthy way.⁹

While staying home and temporary closure of sports facilities, members of the public may perceive that it is difficult to maintain physically active. In fact, WHO recommendations on physical activity can be achieved at home with limited space, with no special sporting equipment and without going to gymnastics room, and with bouts of mini-workout (10 or 15 minutes) accumulated throughout the day.¹⁰

Below are some tips on how to stay physically active and reduce sedentary behaviour while at home —

- ✓ Do home-based exercises or dance with music. To empower members of the public to do more physical activities, the Department of Health (DH) produced a number of demonstration videos for different settings, including the Household Fitness Dance that can be viewed at www.change4health.gov.hk/en/resources/av_gallery.



For more challenging muscle-strengthening activities, go for jumping jack, high knee running in, push-up, abdominal crunch sit up, plank/side plank, etc. Please refer to the Muscle-Strengthening Activities for Better Health (in Chinese only) for more details and the pamphlet can be downloaded at www.chp.gov.hk/files/her/2563_doh_brochure_tc.pdf ;

- ✓ Do household chores. Maintaining environmental hygiene is one of the keys to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. Moderate-intensity home activities include sweeping floor, wiping windows, scrubbing bathroom or bathtub with some efforts¹¹;
- ✓ Use plastic water bottles or heavy books as weights for bicep workouts; a sturdy stool or chair for step-up exercise to work the gluteal muscles (buttocks) and the quadriceps muscles on the front of the thighs;
- ✓ Engage in some physical activities while watching television, such as squat, lunge, stepping on the spot or stretching exercise;
- ✓ Pace around, stand up or do toe lifts while talking on the phone;

- ✓ Stand up while folding laundry, ironing or performing other sit-down household tasks;
- ✓ Break up long periods of sitting, such as light walking for 1 minute. Do leg raise or ankle rotation exercise as often as possible while sitting.
- ✓ Be aware of screen time and take regular breaks from on-screen activities.
- ✓ While videogames can be a way to relax, it can be tempting to spend much more time on them than usual when at home for long periods. Be sure to have a balance of activities in daily life and choose playing active videogames.¹²

Together, We Fight the Virus and Keep Healthy

The DH is committed to protecting public health and will continue to organise systematic health communication campaigns to increase health literacy of the general public. To reduce the risk of non-communicable and communicable diseases, members of the public are urged to lead a healthy lifestyle (i.e. having a healthy diet, keeping physically active along with no smoking, avoiding alcohol drinking and getting adequate rest), observe good personal hygiene (such as keeping hands clean at all times and washing hands with soap and water often), ensure environmental hygiene (such as maintaining drainage pipes properly and pouring about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap)), and follow Government's health advice (such as going out less and reducing social activities, and maintaining appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic).

As people with pre-existing chronic diseases (such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus and chronic respiratory disease) are more susceptible to becoming severely ill with COVID-19, they should be extra cautious, continue to take medication as prescribed and follow medical advice. For more information about the infection situation and relevant health notice and advice, please visit the thematic webpage: www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html.

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#BeActive for the UN International Day of Sport for Development and Peace

FIFA has joined forces with the United Nations (UN) and the WHO in supporting the #BeActive campaign launched on the UN International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (6 April) to encourage people to be #HealthyAtHome as the world comes together in the fight against COVID-19.

Be active and remain healthy at home include the following suggestions along with any other form of home-based recreation:



To know more about the campaign, please visit the www.who.int/news-room/detail/06-04-2020-beactive-for-the-un-international-day-of-sport-for-development-and-peace.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) WATCH is dedicated to promote public's awareness of and disseminate health information about non-communicable diseases and related issues, and the importance of their prevention and control. It is also an indication of our commitments in responsive risk communication and to address the growing non-communicable disease threats to the health of our community. The Editorial Board welcomes your views and comments. Please send all comments and/or questions to so_dp3@dh.gov.hk.

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