

## Ease up on overeating

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by Eveline Gan

**TODAY**  
we set you thinking

To say that my family eats a lot is an understatement. My adolescent cousins can easily wolf down two fast food meals in a single seating.

At family dinners, where we often ask for second helpings of rice, my uncle would insist on ending his meal with a well-greased plate of hor fun. Without it, he said, his meal would feel incomplete.

Like my family, Singaporeans love to overeat. Anecdotes from nutrition experts Today spoke to suggest that eating until one is bursting at the seams is a daily ritual for many Singaporeans - a habit that is taking a toll on our waistlines.

The latest National Health Survey released earlier this month found that 10.8 per cent of the Singaporean population is obese. The figure is an approximate 50-per-cent increase from the 6.9 per cent recorded in 2004.

Ms Phoebe Tay, a dietitian at the National University Hospital, attributed it to the changing culture of eating out more frequently due to an increasingly hectic lifestyle. According to the survey, six in 10 Singaporeans eat out.

"People may be opting for more fast food and hawker food which are high in fat and sugar. Fast food places are also offering the option of upsizing meals at a low cost so people tend to eat more to get their money's worth," said Ms Tay.

Overeating on a daily basis can become habit that is hard to kick. Excess calories, if not burnt off with adequate physical activity, will lead to weight gain.

This is because the stomach can stretch to accommodate extra food.

"If overeating becomes a habit, the body starts to associate a larger amount of food with satiety, so if the person consumes less food, he can feel unsatisfied," Ms Tay explained.

Rather than focus just on the amount of calories consumed, Koay Saw Lan, head of Dietetics and Nutrition Services at Singapore

General Hospital, said the quality of the meal is equally important when it comes to weight management.

"For example, even though veggies are healthy, it is important to note how they are cooked too. Excess oil and gravy will add on to your calorie intake," she said.

How food is cooked can greatly tip the calorie-scale balance.

"Take steamed fish and deep-fried fish for instance. The same fish can have a very different calorie content," said Mdm Koay.

"The crispier it is, the more oil is used and the higher amount of calories it contains."

The recommended daily calorie intake by Health Promotion Board (HPB) for an adult man (weighing around 60 kg) and an adult woman (weighing around 55kg) doing light activity is around 2,400 and 2,000 calories, respectively.

However, Ms Tay added, many Singaporeans lead very sedentary lifestyles, so it is better to consume even lower calories daily to prevent weight gain.

The HPB has rolled out a lower-calorie meals campaign, featuring hawker stalls and restaurants that offer specially designed lower-calorie set meals. Each meal contains less than 600 calories, which make up about a third of an adult's daily energy requirements.

Log on to [www.hpb.gov.sg](http://www.hpb.gov.sg) for the full list of participating outlets.

### Here're some tips from NUH dietitian Phoebe Tay on how you can "trick" your body into feeling full with a smaller portion of food.

- Instead of eating off shared plates from the dining table, pre-portion a meal first. Scoop out your own portion of rice, meat, fish and vegetables. Remember, no second helpings.
- Eat slowly and chew well for about 20 times per bite. One tip is to put your spoon down between mouthfuls, and finish one mouthful before putting in another. This triggers a "feedback mechanism" which limit gastrointestinal activity, promoting satiety.
- Opt for high-fibre foods such as wholegrains. They slow down digestion and keep you full for a longer time.
- Eat your veggies first. The fibre occupies space in the stomach, slowing down digestion and helps you feel full earlier.

URL <http://www.todayonline.com/Health/EDC101123-000027/Ease-up-on-overeating>

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# The Claim: Drinking Water Before Meals Aids Weight Loss

By ANAHAD O'CONNOR

**THE FACTS** Late November marks the start of the gluttonous holiday season. But a simple step might help keep food intake in check: a glass of water before meals.

Dieters have been encouraged to employ this trick for ages, with the reasoning quite simple: the water fills the stomach, thus reducing hunger. But only in recent years have studies borne this out.

In the most recent, a randomized trial published in the journal *Obesity* in February, scientists at Virginia Tech followed a group of overweight subjects age 55 and up on low-calorie diets for about three months. Half the people were told to drink two cups of water before every meal. At the end of the study, the water group had lost an average of 15.5 pounds, compared with 11 pounds in the other group.

A 2008 study showed a similar effect, finding a 13 percent reduction in calorie intake in overweight subjects who consumed water before breakfast. But a third study, this one in 2007, had a peculiar finding: drinking water 30 minutes before a meal reduced calorie intake and feelings of hunger in older adults, but had little effect on subjects under 35. It's not clear why, but the researchers pointed out that because older adults are at increased risk of being overweight and obese, further studies should determine whether this is effective for the aging population.

Studies show the average person gains about a pound between Thanksgiving and January. Most adults gain one to two pounds a year over a lifetime, so staving off the holiday pound can go a long way.

**THE BOTTOM LINE** Drinking water before a meal can reduce calorie intake, though the effect seems most prominent in older people.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/health/16really.html>