

Deep Fried Foods and Associated Health Risks in Malaysia

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Emerging Health Issues

Consumption of energy dense food such as those of deep fried food (fried chicken, rice, fish, potatoes) can lead to excessive weight gain [1]. The traditional food culture in Malaysia seems to be preoccupied with deep fried foods in most part of the countries. There has been studied in recent past that exhibit a strong correlation between fried foods and diabetes [1]. According to the article published online on Reuters Thomas [2], traditional Malaysian diet containing high cholesterol coconut milk, clarified butter and sugar cane can be considered among the most unhealthy diets. There is a sharp increase in obese people in South East Asian Muslim countries with Malaysia being the most susceptible to higher rate of diabetes, stroke and heart diseases [2]. Further health spending by Malaysian government has doubled in last 17 years. This alone can become a major health disaster in coming times aided by excessive reliance on motor bikes and automobiles [2]. The diet pattern is moving in the direction of consuming far more calories than the required amount coupled with increasingly sedentary life style. There is a serious need to improve the quality of food and life through scientific investigations and recommendations [3].

Way Forward

National Education Campaigns

Consumer awareness campaigns are needed at national level to educate about the harms of excessively eating deep fried foods. Ministry of Health and Education should encourage research projects that are focused on finding a relationship between diet and health. A comprehensive urgent policy reforms addressing diet related health issues are needed to be included in national health agenda to reduce the health spending while ensuring better quality of life.

Reducing fat uptake

Changing the food culture is not going to be a speedy process however improving the quality and safety of food can be achieved comparatively quicker. Lowering the fat uptake by the fried food is a challenging task as it affects the taste of the food [4]. There have been certain efforts in Europe and elsewhere around the world to develop innovative edible food coatings (cellulose, gellan gum and soy protein films) that can lower the fat uptake during deep frying of food without changing the taste of the product [4].

Ensuring quality of oil used

Moreover there is a need to develop a strict regulatory and monitoring framework for ensuring the quality of oil that is being used in frying processes. According to 3rd International Symposium on Deep-Fat Frying in 2000 [3], certain recommendations are set out for preventing the abuse of frying oil. Among them rapid tests needs to be developed for checking the quality of oil used in frying operations. These tests should:

- Correlate with internationally recognized standard
- Provide an objective index
- Be easy to use
- Safe for use in food processing/preparation area
- Quantify with oil degradation
- Field rugged

In conclusion a new approach towards diet and health especially deep fried foods is inevitable for ensuring better health management in coming years. Otherwise these diet related health concerns will rise to sky high making it more difficult to curtail within health budget spending.

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