

CALORIE INTAKE AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FOOD CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

Medical students experience time constraints and stress in studying, thus, they tend to have an imbalanced diet. This study assessed the calorie intake and factors associated with food consumption among medical students in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The self-administered questionnaires regarding the knowledge and attitude about food consumption, factors affecting food intake and a 24-hour dietary recall was completed by 101 students. They had overall good knowledge on food consumption, calorie content, hygienic food preparation and balanced diet, 52.5% had normal BMI, 80.2% considered to reduce fast food consumption, and 76.2% consumed food for the tastiness. There was a significant correlation between respondents' knowledge and total calorie intake ($p < 0.05$). The main factors affecting food consumption are types of food chosen, amount of food taken and frequency of meals consumed. The total calorie intake differs between male and female. Majority of the students had one to two servings of fruit per day. The knowledge plays an important role in total calorie intake. The results suggest that the subjects were more concerned about the taste of the food rather than the cost and nutritional value.

Key words: Balanced diet, BMI, Calorie intake, Medical Students in UNIMAS Sarawak

INTRODUCTION

Food is an important component to sustain lives and providing energy to do works. The amount of energy can be calculated by the amount of calorie in the food. Food define as any material from either plant or animal source that is made up of a wide variety of essential nutrients and is taken into the body to be used for many bodily functions which are required for life sustenance (Nielsen *et al.*, 2002). The nutrients supply by the foods can be generally classified into macronutrients and micronutrients. Macronutrients are further divided into carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Micronutrients also have sub-groups which mainly consist of vitamins and minerals. The most energy required by the body is obtained through the consumption of macronutrients (Washington State University, 2015).

Since macronutrients act as the main energy provider, the consumption must be in large amounts (United States Department of Agriculture, 2010). Calorie intake varies between individuals by age, gender, level of physical activity and other factors. Some people are not aware the amount of calorie they should take and tend to consume more than they should which lead to some negative impacts. The calorie content of meals outside of the house was 55% higher than having homemade meals (Zoumas-Morse *et al.*, 2001). The consumption of imbalanced diet by students becomes higher as they change their surrounding environment into university life (Nielsen *et al.*, 2002). This applies to the medical students as well, in which they are experiencing time constraint and stress during study. These are the environmental factors that trigger the development of poor eating habits among the medical students. The availability of the foods around the campus is highly accessible by the

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