



UTM
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

UHAK 1012:
GRADUATE SUCCESS ATTRIBUTES
SECTION 63

INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT:
CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN MALAYSIA

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Is obesity a common problem among children in Malaysia? In Malaysia, obesity among children between the ages of seven and ten increased from 6.6% to 13.6% according to the Nutrition Society of Malaysia. This is a very bad phenomenon. This problem is likely to continue until they grow up if no precautions are taken. Obesity is one of the burden in health care system in Malaysia which can lead to high mortality and morbidity. Obesity is a condition where a person has excessive body weight due to accumulation of fat in the body. Obesity results when the size or number of fat cells in a person's body increases Myers (2004). According to Health Ministry statistics, heart disease is the third leading cause of deaths of patients in Malaysia and obesity is one of the factor that may lead to this disease. Parents often say that kids with fluffy cheeks and fat bodies are cute. Their cheeks will be pinched and they will be pampered by parents including the people surrounding them. This "acceptance" by the society makes parents comfortable with the physical features of their children. At a young age, children will not be ashamed of their physical condition as they are still considered cute. But what happens after they grown up?

What are the factors that causes the statistic of the childhood obesity keep on increasing in Malaysia? Many parents fail to understand the actual nutritional needs of their children during the period of growth. Nowadays parents are too busy with their works in order to earn money due to the rising cost of living. Thus they have no time to prepare nutritious and healthy food for their children and they will just buy fast food or junk food that contains high mono sodium glutamate (MSG). Ka He, a nutrition expert at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, found that people who eat more MSG are more likely to be overweight or obese. Children in lower socio-economics groups also tend to be obese as their parents cannot afford to buy nutritious and low calories foods for them. Usually people who in lower socio-economics groups have low education level, so they have lack of knowledge about obesity and raising awareness about obesity. Thus it is not surprising that the number of childhood obesity increase vigorously every year because of parents ignorance and lack of public understanding about childhood obesity.

How to overcome this problem? Parents should provide balanced meals to their children to ensure that their growth and development in a good conditions and expose and teach them about food pyramid that includes carbohydrates, proteins, vegetables, fruits and fats .In addition, as a parents, they need to avoid buying fast food and snacks and spend some times to cook at home and provide more nutritious food for their children. They also should avoid bring the children to fast food restaurants because foods in fast food restaurants are not only high in fat but contain high calories and can affect the children's health.

Excessive use of television and gadget such as tablet and handphone are one of the factors that contribute to this problem. Parents nowadays love to give their child gadget or television in order to make them occupied. This obesity problem happened due to the lack of physical activity when they using gadgets or other electronic media. Kids tend to be unproductive and "couch potato" which means comfortable sitting and lying down for hours using gadgets, watching TV and more. In a long term, the children cannot burn the calories inside their bodies and their metabolism rate also decrease. Children obesity is also linked to the impact of advertising and marketing food products they watch from electronic media. Nowadays many unhealthy food advertisement such as fast food and chips in the television and internet and this food advertising can directly affect the types of foods that children actually want eat.

Way to overcome this factors is by, government should prohibit advertisement of variety of snack food products and fast foods and advertised more healthy food such as fruits and vegetables. As a result, the children would not influenced to eat snack food and unhealthy food. Parents also should monitor and control the excess usage of the gadget by limiting their time to use or play the gadget. In addition, parents can also do exercise and recreational activities such as aerobics, jogging, biking, swimming and hiking with their children .This physical activity can help to lose weight by burning of the calories in the body. As a result, children are able to develop high levels of immunization against the onset of illness and increase their metabolism rate. Physical activities should be done at least 20 minutes a day and three times a week. The parents should normalize exercise and recreational activities with their children so that healthy living practices can be nurtured in the family.

Government also should organize or launched healthy exercises campaign to encourage public interest in exercise and promoting the benefits of regular exercise to health.

Genetic factors can also contribute to the risk of childhood obesity where it can be inherited from the previous generation to the next generation in a family. However, this doesn't mean that if there are families members who are obese, the other family member will also suffer obesity. Genetic factor often linked to environmental and behavioral factors such as eating and activity habits. Malaysia is well known with many type of delicious food but oily and greasy. Food served at a five-star restaurant, mamak restaurant, or home cooked by mom or wife is often overflowing with oil, coconut milk, curry and greasy. This type of food can cause obesity and lead to heart attack by having a blockage in flow of blood to heart. Malaysian people should reduce the intake of food that have high calories and fats and normalize the intake of healthy food in the daily life.

The selection of nutritious foods at school is also limited and most of the foods sell at the school canteen are unhealthy, high in calories, high in sugar, salt and even high in cholesterol. Kids tend to spend their daily spending on snacks rather than other nutritious foods such as rice dishes and noodles. Selling snacks and carbonated drink at school also cause children more likely to consume sugar. School canteen nowadays prefer to sell junk food and unhealthy food that is a favorite among children to increase their profit. This issues should be monitor and control seriously by the parents and school authorities such as teachers and school canteen operators. Unhealthy snack and beverages should be banned and stopped selling at school. Parents and school authorities should propose to the government to hire at least one dietitian who has a clear concept regarding food material utilization, cooking methods and nutritional values at school canteen. It is to ensure that children's nutritional intake meets the daily requirement and to help children to develop correct eating habits and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

There are a few tips how to obesity on children. The first tip is parent should pay attention to their lifestyle before their having child. During pregnancy, the mother should eat healthy food because the baby in the womb get the nutrient supply directly from the mother. If the mother eating unhealthy

food during the pregnancy, the baby that will be come out can be overweight. As a parent also they have to make sure their children get enough sleep, this is because lack of sleep can increase their appetite to fatty and sugary foods.

As someone who going to be a parents in the future, I have learned that before having children, I must have knowledge about actual nutritional needs by children during their period of growth. The biggest hurdle in life for me is time management. I found that having worst time management not only bad for myself but also give negative effect to people surrounding me. As a parents in the future, I must know how to divide my time between work and family. Prepare and cook nutritious food at home can reduce the risk for the children to get obesity. For children, parents are their role model so they tend to follow what their parent do. As a good parents, we must be a good example to them and in this case parents influence on children's eating and exercise habits.

In conclusion, all parties especially parents, play important roles in reducing obesity in childhood case in Malaysia. All parties must take part in increasing public awareness about childhood obesity and practices healthy eating and active living. This childhood obesity bring a lot of negative implications on healthy and economy as the children are suppose to be energetic generation in the future. Government should also reviewed the health policy to improve public health outcomes. If this cases keep on increasing in our country, future generation will have low self-esteem and poor self-image. Therefore, obesity in children must be tackled as soon as possible before more Malaysians children experience it.

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