

MAKE HEALTHY DIET WORK FOR YOU



HAPPIER, HEALTHIER EMPLOYEES ARE MORE PRODUCTIVE AND ENGAGED AT WORK, WRITES KAVINDA HATTIARACHCHI, WHO FINDS OUT FROM A RENOWNED COMBINATION TRAINER HOW THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED

You might have heard the saying 'you are what you eat' which is something Le Cordon Bleu trained chef and qualified personal trainer Haitham Khalid strongly believes in. During an interview with Haitham The Executive.qa discussed why it is not only important for individuals

but also companies to think about diet and lifestyle. This will ensure that an organisation's biggest and most valuable resource - human capital - is in excellent condition to work productively. Happier, healthier employees are more productive and engaged at work. When employees are

healthy it will reduce absence rates, healthcare costs and increase creativity and morale.

Governments, companies and individuals incur greater healthcare costs as a result of poor lifestyle choices and bad eating habits. Some

people have wrongly convinced themselves that genetics, lack of time and high cost of healthy food are to blame. These are some of the common excuses they give for not caring for their health but in reality most people do not invest enough time in order to ensure that they maintain a healthy lifestyle and a healthy diet which can be done at little or no additional cost once you understand your healthy lifestyle objectives and how to achieve them.

“Your Health First” is a five-year multi-stage campaign run by Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) in association with the Supreme Council of Health and in strategic partnership with the Supreme Education Council, Qatar Petroleum, Occidental Petroleum of Qatar, ExxonMobil and Vodafone Qatar. This initiative is aimed at educating both the local and expat communities about the importance of making informed, healthy lifestyle choices. The Qatar STEPS Survey of chronic disease risk factors in the country, carried out by the SCH between March and May revealed a pattern of unhealthy lifestyle choices among Qataris.

QNV 2030 speaks of many initiatives and challenges in building a healthy workforce. Qatar plans to develop an integrated system for healthcare managed according to world class standards. The emerging integrated healthcare system will address the three principal causes of mortality mentioned above (i.e. chronic illnesses, injuries and congenital diseases) along with the underlying risk factors.

The implications of this lack of investment in one’s “wellness” leads to high obesity rates, high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic heart disease and stress. Studies show that 70 per cent of deaths in Qatar result from chronic illnesses and injuries. Chronic illnesses resulting from congenital diseases account for more than 50 per cent of the deaths. Of particular concern is the fact that 16.4 per cent of Qataris suffer from diabetes, well above the global average of 6.4 per cent. The disease, which has the fourth highest rate per capita in the world, causes long-term disabilities among those afflicted by

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it as well as high healthcare costs for the government. Health studies on the Qatari population have also found high rates of asthma and cardiovascular disease.

Across the Gulf countries obesity is becoming a real issue and this, and many of the major health issues prevalent in the Qatari population, is largely due to the sedentary lifestyle and bad eating habits. The Executive.qa discussed eating habits with Haitham

and he identified three of the major problem areas with common eating habits — (high levels of consumption of carbohydrates, saturated fats and refined sugar in Qatar and most other Arab countries.

Many Arabic dishes include carbohydrates such as white rice and white bread, pasta and potatoes. Carbohydrates give the body energy but heavy consumption of carbohydrates is not good unless you can burn it.



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Carbohydrates should be substituted for complex carbohydrates which are contained in brown alternatives such as brown rice and brown bread which the body converts into energy much more easily.

Arabic dishes also contain a lot of saturated fats which are found in ingredients such as meat and butter.

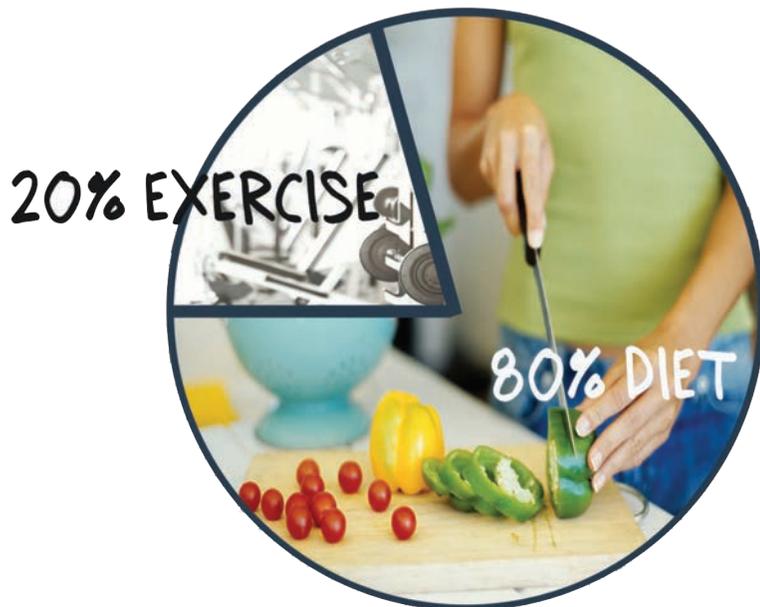
Any products derived from animals contain higher amounts of saturated fats which should be consumed sparingly as the human body does not easily break down saturated fats. There are different categories of fats, saturated fats being one of them. A healthy human body needs to consume fats (25 to 30 per cent of human diet should consist of fats) but it is

important to incorporate a mix of fats into your diet which should include “good” fats.

Saturated fats should be substituted for ingredients containing “good” fats such as monounsaturated fats. Examples of foods high in monounsaturated fat include avocados, nuts, olives, peanuts and canola oils. Scientists believe that increased consumption of monounsaturated fats (for example eating more nuts) is beneficial in lowering LDL cholesterol (the “bad” cholesterol) and lowering the risk of coronary heart disease.

Haitham also pointed out the high levels of refined sugar in people’s diets in Qatar. Daily habitual consumption of numerous teas, coffees and juices, which can contain high levels of refined sugar, gets converted into body fat unless burned. There are also different types of sugars. For instance fructose sugar (which is contained in fruits) is more easily converted into energy. The next time you order a fruit juice ask them not to add sugar. Also try to reduce sugar in hot drinks such as tea or coffee as much as possible.

Busy executives reading this article are likely to think that in spite of consuming relatively less carbohydrates, saturated fats and sugar their body or health is



WEIGHT LOSS



Combination Trainer
Haitham Khalid

not in the shape in which they would like it to be. This is where you need to understand the importance of regular exercise and more importantly the processing ability of your body. Another factor to be considered here is how your daily routine provides for the consumption of energy produced by the food contained in your diet.

Essentially it is the individual's responsibility to identify and achieve their objective to live healthily by understanding how to maintain a healthy diet and to do regular exercise. Lifestyle is extremely important and routine exercise is crucial unless you are active and burning a lot of energy in your daily routine. Everyone's body is different. Some people have a fast metabolism and can burn

carbohydrates, fats and sugars quickly, but employers should also create a system to assist their employees in taking the first steps towards achieving a healthy lifestyle.

Many organisations in Qatar have started health awareness programmes and healthy meal programmes for their employees which Haitham says should be combined with an exercise education platform - the two go hand-in-hand - you can eat healthy and not put on weight but you should still exercise. Conversely you can exercise a lot and this may not have the impact that you are expecting because your diet is not in line with your exercise objectives. Group activities which incorporate an element of fitness activity are usually also great exercises in building bonds.

The body's ability to process and absorb nutrients from the food a person consumes declines as he or she gets older so doing regular exercise becomes increasingly important with age. If you're exercising regularly, make sure your body gets the nutritional support it needs. Two essential minerals are iron, which helps in maintaining a healthy flow of blood, and zinc, which helps in maintaining a healthy metabolism and immune system. Exercising could also impact joints. If you're suffering from tired and painful joints your body's supply of the natural amino sugar (i.e. glucosamine) could be low. Glucosamine repairs and heals damaged joints and supports new cartilage formation.



6 tips to get you to eat more healthily

- I. Get a blender or juicer machine enabling you to consume essential vitamins in an unprocessed way. The blender will remove the fibre from fruit and vegetables and leave you with the pure juice that contains all the nutrients much of which is lost when the same ingredients are cooked. Fresh fruit juices and vegetable drinks are quick and easy to prepare and can therefore be easily incorporated into a daily routine even for people who lead a fast-paced lifestyle.
- II. This is the best way to get a good dose of vitamins and a great way to start your day. Don't be scared about using lots of different vegetables and fruits like carrots, beetroot, ginger, guava, fennel and lots of greens like cucumber, spinach, and broccoli. Seeds are also a good source of vitamins and essential oils that your body needs and there are lots you can use. Two good ones to get you started are chia seeds and hemp seeds. Try a blended drink every morning and see how you feel after a few weeks - you will certainly notice a difference in your skin and energy levels.
- III. Try to eat lots of fish and cut down on red meats. Eat complex carbohydrates such as lentils, pulses, beans, grains, seeds, nuts and vegetables. Also try steaming your food where possible.
- IV. Reduce your sugar and salt consumption by half and see what happens after a month. Processed and take away food will generally contain high levels of fats, sugars and salts.
- V. Control your portion size and eat smaller meals more frequently. Eating smaller portions more frequently will speed up your metabolism and your body will respond by burning the food more effectively. The food on your plate should never be bigger than the size of the palm of your two hands joined together.
- VI. Know what you eat - cook your own food as regularly as possible. Haitham says that he has observed through his career as a chef and running his own culinary school, that the best chefs or home cooks are the ones that enjoy cooking. If you don't feel confident or are like a visitor in your own kitchen then you may hesitate to start?

Haitham says that a meal tastes good when shared with friends and family and recommends cooking with and for friends - you may all be beginners in which case you can learn together or some will have more experience and can teach and boost the confidence of the less experienced. You could agree have an evening once a week where each of you can cook a healthy meal for the others. Talk at the dinner table about the meal and lap up all the great complements as your cooking skills develop. This will boost your enthusiasm and passion for cooking.

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Qatar needs to address the root causes of these health issues which are largely lifestyle related and seem

to be the biggest health risks facing the Qatari population. Government initiatives should be complemented by corporate initiatives in this area and health education and facilitation should be a top priority for government and corporates in order to instill and encourage a sense of responsibility among individuals.

Haitham Khalid is a 'Combination Trainer' and the founder of London-based healthy lifestyle company Fitness With Food (see www.fitnesswithfood.com)