

Come jog with me

EXCLUSIVE

BY M. KRISHNAMOORTHY

Soi Lek on a mission to check lifestyle diseases

WHEN Health Minister Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek sets out on his daily morning jog, he is burdened by the fact that only two out of every 10 Malaysians exercise regularly to keep fit.

And he is not proud of another fact that in the Asean region, Malaysians are ranked the highest when it comes to obesity.

"We have lifestyle diseases spreading across the nation," he warned.

Dr Chua is on a mission to bring down the incidence of lifestyle diseases like obesity, diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.

He has already convinced the Government to allocate RM50mil for the Health Promotion Board, which will be set up under his ministry to carry out activities to promote a fitter Malaysia.

The Health Promotion Board Bill will be tabled at this Parliament sitting. The board will be headed by a chief executive officer and its members will include officials from various non-governmental

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The Health Minister keeps healthy with a morning jog and exercises. Check out his routine in Page 3

SEARPIX by KAMAL SELLEHUDDIN

80% don't exercise, says Chua

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organisations and professional people.

"The board will function like a private sector body. We want the leadership to run it like a business because we want to emphasise the importance of fighting lifestyle diseases," said Dr Chua.

And health promotion, he stressed, was imperative if Malaysia was not to be saddled with such diseases.

As he sees it, the individual is ultimately responsible for his own health but the upward trend in lifestyle diseases is not comforting at all.

Lifestyle Diseases

Number of cases in hospitals	2000	2005
Hypertension-related diseases	32,886	38,445
Blockage of heart diseases	33,623	39,594
Other heart diseases	17,598	25,362
Stroke/vascular diseases	13,868	16,896
Diabetes	27,179	39,762



He said 30% of Malaysians suffered from obesity, hypertension and high cholesterol, while 8.5% suffered from diabetes.

"About 80% of Malaysians do not exercise.

"If we don't exercise and eat the right food regularly, then our immune systems will break down and we can be vulnerable to diseases," he added.

According to Dr Chua, the number of kidney patients on dialysis machines in Malaysia was among the highest in the

region.

And half of them are related to complications related to diabetes.

"Twenty years ago, only 6% of the population had diabetes. A lot of people think that we will hit 12% by 2020," Dr Chua said.

In addition to lifestyle diseases, Malaysia is also facing a range of emerging diseases like avian flu and severe acute respiratory syndrome while others such as tuberculosis and malaria are making a comeback.

Chua walks the talk for over 10 years

SUNGAI BULOH: Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek speaks from experience when he advises Malaysians to exercise more.

For more than 10 years, he has been jogging, doing *qi gong* and stretching exercises.

He leaves the house at 6.30am each day, walking and intermittently jogging over the green hills and valleys, traversing ponds and climbing the steps of his neighbourhood in Sierramas.

Dr Chua is not doing it because he is the Health Minister but to keep in shape and stay healthy at 59.

His concern for the environment dates back to his days as an assemblyman and a Johor exco member and he is proud to be a prime mover of the Endau Rompin development where trekkers go to keep fit.

From trekking and mountain climbing years ago, Dr Chua now restricts himself to a daily routine of an hour's walking and climbing steps in the plush residential area that was once an oil palm estate.

"I am very happy to live in this beautiful greenery, away from the hustle and bustle of Ampang," he said yesterday.