

# A SIMPLE GUIDE

*To Healthy Living*

OCT-DEC 2018 ISSUE 58

MICA (P) 129/08/2017

## **LIFE IS NOT OVER WITH DIABETES**

**How to manage the  
condition and live  
to the fullest**

## **PAIN IN YOUR JOINTS?**

**It could be gout, and  
your GP can treat it**

## **EXERCISE TO LOSE WEIGHT**

**Start with simple steps**



# WHY CAN'T I LOSE WEIGHT?



**AUTHOR DR LIN JINLIN**, Consultant Surgeon General, Upper Gastrointestinal and Bariatric Surgery, Changi General Hospital

**IT ISN'T AS SIMPLE AS GOING ON A DIET OR EXERCISING FOR SOME. OBESITY IS A MEDICAL PROBLEM THAT COULD REVEAL OTHER CONDITIONS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT. DR LIN JINLIN SHARES HIS STORY ABOUT A YOUNG GIRL TO HELP US UNDERSTAND OBESITY.**



I first met J when she was admitted to Department of General Surgery in 2017. She was 23 years old and had suffered some minor trauma after a fall. I remembered that she looked obese but not much else, as she was discharged after a few days without much issue. The next time I saw J was when she came to our outpatient clinic for her follow-up appointment. It was then that I noticed her difficulties. She was walking towards me with a walking stick, sweating profusely and breathless, after only 20 metres.

J later confided in me that she had always struggled with her weight since her childhood. She had been putting on weight steadily and weighed about 160kg when we first met. All attempts at dieting, exercise, slimming pills etc. yielded temporary results, with subsequent rebound weight gain. Physically, J suffered from a whole list of conditions that should only be commonly seen in a person three times her age: chronic

joint and back pain, sleep apnea, poor effort tolerance, irregular menses and high blood pressure. In addition, we also found J to have type 2 diabetes, a condition typically seen in older patients. Socially and mentally, J suffered from depression and anxiety, being unable to keep regular employment and enjoy normal social interaction with others. It seemed to J that her life was in a downward spiral, which had culminated in her reaching her wits end.

J's story is an increasingly common one. The obesity rate in Singapore continues to rise at an alarming rate, similarly with trends worldwide. According to the last National Health Survey in 2010, the obesity rate in Singapore is 11%. This is estimated to reach 15% within the next decade. There are numerous medical conditions associated with obesity, with two of them being particularly important: diabetes and cancer. The other area of concern related to obesity is the psychosocial impact it has on patients:

poor self-esteem, discrimination and stigmatisation. For a young adult like J, obesity has definitely had a huge impact on her quality of life, both physically and mentally.

Bariatric and metabolic surgery can help patients like J to lose weight and improve medical conditions related to obesity, like diabetes, high blood pressure and sleep apnea. The underlying principle is to alter the patient's anatomy such that only a small volume of stomach comes into contact with the amount of food consumed. As a result, patients are able to feel full and satisfied after eating an appetiser-sized meal, thereby reducing caloric intake and losing weight.

Naturally, not all patients are suitable and there are risks involved. Before surgery, patients are carefully assessed and counselled by a multidisciplinary team of doctors and allied health specialists. There are significant lifestyle changes that the patient has to undergo after



surgery, and we do our best to prepare them for that. Patients will also need to maintain good dietary habits and a healthy lifestyle to keep their weight off. In the journey that the patients undertake to lose weight, surgery is akin to getting a significant head start, but getting to the final destination takes effort and determination as well.

After about six weeks of preparation, including losing about 10kg, J underwent a sleeve gastrectomy successfully at the end of 2017. Thus far, J has lost about 30kg in total, and her blood pressure and sugar levels have become normal. More importantly, J has said that she felt much better and is looking forward to life every day.

The most striking image I remember is of J walking in for her last appointment. She was without her walking stick and not feeling breathless, and had a smile on her face."

## SOME WEIGHING ISSUES

AUTHOR DR LINSEY UTAMI GANI, ECHO Programme Director

Dear Readers,

I hope you have been keeping well! We kick off this issue with a health problem that has been increasingly pervasive in our population - Obesity and weight loss. According to the Health Promotion Board, Singapore could hit obesity rates of 15% in a few years. With the rise of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure, addressing obesity and weight loss is of paramount importance. In this edition, we have invited Dr Lin Junlin, one of our bariatric surgeons, to share on the topic of bariatric surgery and how it can help a select group of patients struggling with obesity.



Tackling obesity requires a multi-pronged approach with changes in diet and lifestyle choices and the incorporation of exercise into daily life. Our physiotherapist is here to give us tips about different types of exercise to kick start a more active lifestyle. There is also a section by our dietician about 'mindful eating', which is also important because at most times, eating is so 'automatic' that we hardly put any thought into what we put into our mouth. In that same vein, those of us who have been recently diagnosed with chronic diseases such as diabetes will find that we can now longer 'automatically' consume food. There are new considerations and potential complications from the medical conditions that need to be taken into account. Our psychologist is here to help us with some tips on how to balance the new diagnosis of a chronic disease and its impact on our daily life.

Having a good relationship with your primary care doctor or GP is also important in navigating the stresses of a chronic disease. Our GPs are able to look after many acute and chronic diseases and are a valuable resource in the community that is easily accessible. One of the most common ailments addressed in this issue is acute gout and what one can expect from a GP visit for its treatment.

ECHO health screening dates are also out for the month of November and October and I encourage you to register and bring along your family and friends. We look forward to meeting you at our screening dates!

# GPFIRST

## YOUR GPs CAN TREAT THIS CONDITION



AUTHOR DR WICKY WONG, General Practitioner

**In January 2014, the GPFIRST Programme was launched to encourage patients in eastern Singapore to see their general practitioners (GPs) for mild-to-moderate conditions rather than head to the emergency department first. In this regular series, our Eastern GPs offer advice on common ailments the community might face.**

**Visit [www.gpfirst.sg](http://www.gpfirst.sg) or see your GP for more information on common conditions such as cuts, bruises, mild scalds, nausea, headaches, sprains and fevers. This issue touches on a common condition experienced – gout.**

**G**out is a form of arthritis caused when excessive uric acid is present in the blood. The uric acid build-up forms uric acid crystals that will cause the joints to swell and become inflamed. This disease typically occurs in the big toe but other areas such as ankles, insteps, heels,

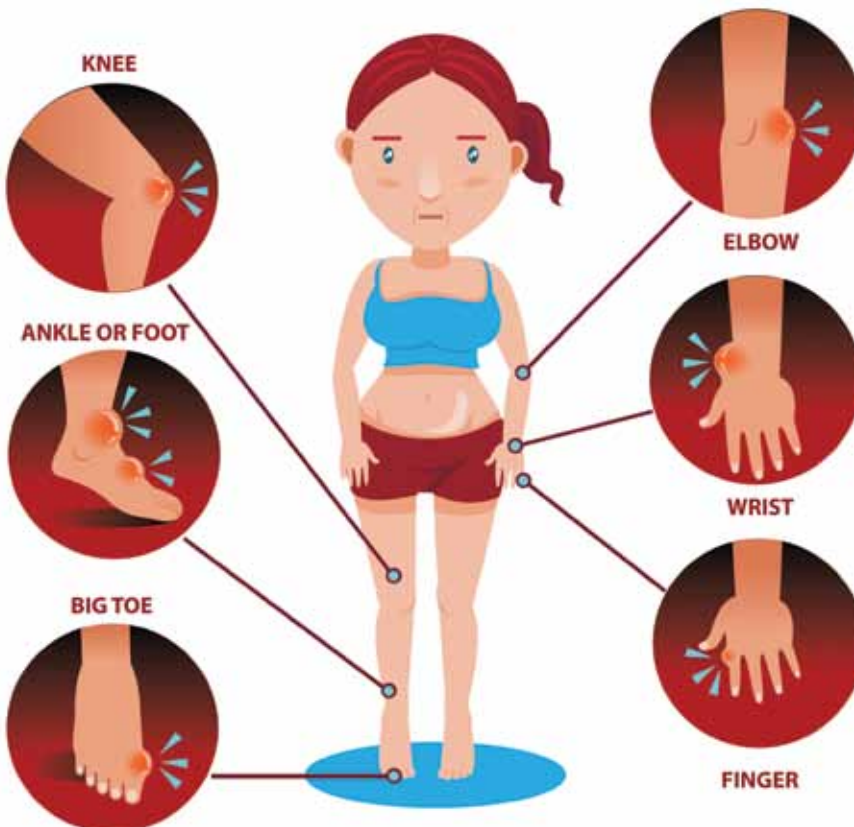
knees and other joints may also be affected. Uric acid is produced when the body breaks down purine, a substance that is found naturally in our body's tissues. Purine is also found in high levels in foods such as seafood, red meat (e.g. beef and pork), organ meats (e.g. liver and kidneys), vegetables such as

cauliflower and asparagus, beans and legumes and alcohol (typically beers, due to yeast). Besides the above triggers, genetics, obesity, metabolic syndrome and consumption of certain medications (e.g. thiazide diuretics) can also increase the risk of gout.

If you are suffering from an acute gout attack, an early visit to your GP is advised, especially if the condition does not improve with simple painkillers. Your GP will consider your medical history and examine the joint to rule out other causes of joint inflammation such as infection and trauma. He is likely to ask you to undergo uric acid and renal function blood tests.

You will be prescribed medication for the acute attack. That usually consists of colchicine and anti-inflammatory painkillers. Colchicine has anti-inflammatory properties and reduces build-up of uric acid crystals in the joints. Anti-inflammatory analgesics reduce both inflammation and pain. If you are on preventive medication such as allopurinol, you should withhold it during a gout flare as it may worsen the attack. Besides medication, it is important to drink plenty of fluids, ensure sufficient rest, and avoid purine-rich foods.

Preventive medications such as allopurinol are suitable for recurrent gout attacks but changes in lifestyle and food choices are important in lowering the risk of gout. Drinking lots of fluid, eating more vegetables, fruits and poultry while reducing red meat, seafood and alcohol will help. Exercising regularly is also important!





# Life is not over with diabetes

**AUTHOR JANET CHANG**, Clinical Psychologist,  
Health Wellness Programme, Changi General Hospital



**WHILE THERE IS NO CURE FOR THE CONDITION, MANY PEOPLE WITH DIABETES CAN CONTINUE TO LIVE A HEALTHY AND FULFILLING LIFE IF THEY TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN MANAGING THE CONDITION WELL. HOW CAN WE DO THIS?**

**A** new diagnosis of diabetes can be overwhelming. There is no known cure yet, so diabetics must learn to cope and manage. This may mean major changes in lifestyle habits and routines for some – from taking medication, to monitoring blood glucose levels, changes in diet and exercising – but that does not mean that a healthy and fulfilling life is unachievable.

If you or your family members are struggling with these new changes, here are some tips that could help:

## 1. Understand the condition.

Take time to learn about what diabetes is and the short- and long-term risks of having the condition. Also learn about how you can manage the condition well, and why these management tactics will be beneficial for you.

Knowing will help you make informed decisions about your diabetes care routine and give meaning to why you are doing it. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor questions and take notes to help you remember.



## 2. Step-by-step, be realistic.

You may be given a lot of information and instructions initially. Be patient and allow yourself to digest the information slowly.

Focus on just one or two areas to make changes to first. Set realistic goals for yourself. Often, starting small and adding up slowly over time makes seemingly difficult goals more easily attainable. For example, if you hardly exercised in the past, you could start first with 10 minutes of walking daily, and gradually build up to 15, 20, and maybe even 30 minutes over time.

## 3. Be open and creative.

Designing and following your diabetes care routine does not have to be a boring chore. Making lifestyle changes, while challenging and confronting, also presents opportunities for you to try new things. Consider your interests and likes as you

create new meal plans or activity schedules. Be open to trying new recipes or activities.

## 4. Reach out for social support.

Remember, you are not alone on this journey. Talk to family and friends about how you feel and how they can help you. Include them in your plans (e.g. look for exercise buddies). If you know of other relatives and friends who have diabetes, talking to them may help you feel less alone. You could even exchange tips to build on what you are already doing!

## 5. Seek professional help.

If you are having difficulties accepting or adjusting to the diagnosis, consider seeing a psychologist or counsellor. He or she could help you address your emotional reactions to the condition, provide some effective strategies to help you manage stress or make behavioural changes, and work with you to improve your self-management of diabetes.

# WORK OUT AND SHAPE UP

**AUTHOR DEW ISABEL LOW**, Physiotherapist, Changi General Hospital



**STARTING AN EXERCISE REGIME TO LOSE WEIGHT CAN BE INTIMIDATING AND DISHEARTENING, ESPECIALLY IF YOU DO NOT KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN. LOSING WEIGHT IS NOT AS DIFFICULT AS YOU THINK. THE KEY IS TO DISCOVER WHAT YOU ENJOY, AND TO MAKE IT A PART OF YOUR DAILY ROUTINE. IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO BE REALISTIC WITH YOUR GOALS. AIMING FOR A WEIGHT LOSS OF NOT MORE THAN 0.5-1KG A WEEK IS A GOOD PLACE TO START.**

**Y**our exercise programme should consist of cardiovascular, resistance and flexibility exercises. Cardiovascular exercise gets your heart and lungs working harder which burns calories at the fastest rate. Resistance exercises are equally important as it helps to build muscles. An increase in muscle mass can raise your metabolism which means burning more calories even at rest! Flexibility exercises on its own may not burn that many calories, but it definitely better prepares your body for exercises that do so, thereby preventing injuries.

Examples include:

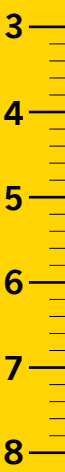
 <p><b>CARDIOVASCULAR</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walking</li> <li>• Hiking</li> <li>• Climbing stairs</li> <li>• Running</li> <li>• Cycling</li> <li>• Swimming</li> <li>• Playing sports like badminton, tennis, soccer</li> </ul>
 <p><b>FLEXIBILITY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stretches – Hamstrings, quadriceps, calves, chest, triceps</li> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Pilates</li> </ul>
 <p><b>RESISTANCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body weight resistance (push ups, squats, lunges)</li> <li>• Resistance bands</li> <li>• Resistance machines</li> </ul>

The recommended guidelines for exercise would be 150 minutes a week at a moderate intensity. As a guide, this means that you may be slightly short of breath and able to speak only in short sentences.

If you have any pre-existing medical conditions or experience abnormal symptoms such as pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath that does not cease when exercise is stopped, do seek medical advice from a doctor or physiotherapist to assist you in designing a suitable programme.

## HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU TO STICK WITH YOUR EXERCISE PROGRAMME:

- 1. Grab a friend or family member to embark on this journey together**  
It is always more fun to do it together!
- 2. Start at a pace or frequency you are comfortable with and build it up from there**  
Starting too much too early can cause you to burn out instead of burn fats!
- 3. Adopt a healthy diet to fuel your exercise regime**  
Seek advice from a certified dietician. A healthy diet does not mean not eating!





# ARE YOU EATING MINDFULLY OR MINDLESSLY?

**AUTHOR** LING PING SING, Principal Dietitian, Dietetic & Food Services, Changi General Hospital



**MOST OF US GO THROUGH OUR DAILY ROUTINE MINDLESSLY; WE ARE SUBCONSCIOUSLY JUST REPEATING OUR ACTIONS, AND EATING IS ONE OF THEM. IF YOU ARE TARGETING WEIGHT LOSS, IT IS TIME TO START BEING MINDFUL OF EATING HABITS THAT YOU NORMALLY NEVER THOUGHT TWICE ABOUT.**

**E**ating is one of the activities that most people do it mindlessly. Do you remember the food going down your stomach during last night's dinner? Did you unknowingly finish your last bag of chips? Do you automatically throw snacks into your shopping basket at the supermarket?

The key to successful weight loss would mean a whole new approach to these 'automatic' actions. Here are some tips.

## 1. Don't skip breakfast



Research shows eating breakfast helps you control your weight, as it helps to reduce cravings throughout the day. Skipping meals also don't help with weight loss; it may in turn reduce your intake of essential nutrients that are important to maintain your health, and end up with more snacking.

## 2. Eat high-fibre food



High fibre food can keep you full for longer periods of time, thus reducing hunger and food cravings. Aim to include at least two servings of fruits and vegetables daily, also include at least three servings of wholegrain products such as oats, wholemeal bread and brown rice per day.

## 3. Use smaller plates



You will gradually get used to eating smaller portions without going hungry. A study also shows that if you eat 10-20% less per meal, our bodies will not sense



the difference, and you will still be satisfied. By shifting from 12-inch plates to 10-inch plates, you can reduce your calories intake by 22%.

## 4. Chew your food well and eat slowly



It takes about 20 minutes for the stomach to tell the brain it's full, so eat slowly. It is recommended to chew at least 10-15 times in between each bite.

## 5. Don't stock up on junk food, have more healthy, convenient food



If you feel the urge to snack, portion out the snack servings instead of eating them directly from the container. Instead of ordering

delivery, give yourself the option of having quick healthy meals instead, such as whole-grain pasta, fruits and vegetables that can be prepared within ten minutes.

## 6. Do not shop on an empty stomach



Shopping when hungry can lead to unhealthy food choices; research shows that the participants who were hungry tend to purchase more high-calorie products. Go shopping after meals!

Making small changes to your eating habits will train your mind to be more mindful on healthy eating. Take a few moments to ponder, and you are on your way to a healthier weight.

# 2018 ECHO HEALTH SCREENING

**T**he ECHO health screenings in Bedok and Kaki Bukit are happening! **SPREAD THE NEWS!** If you have family members, friends or relatives residing in the following constituencies, please encourage them to register for the ECHO health screening!

**Note:** You will no longer be receiving invitation letters by post! If you need to change your mailing address, please email to [ECHO@cgh.com.sg](mailto:ECHO@cgh.com.sg) or contact our ECHO coordinators during office hours.

## HOW TO REGISTER?

- 1) Log on to [www.echohealth.com.sg](http://www.echohealth.com.sg) for online registration when registration starts, payment by VISA / MASTERCARD only.
- 2) Register in-person @ respective CCs listed (below) when registration starts. Bring along your NRIC, together with your cash payment to register.



Screening Site	Health Screening Date	Registration Start Date
Bedok CC	3 Nov (Sat)	3 July 2018
Kaki Bukit Garden RC BLK 526 Bedok North St 3	10 Nov (Sat)	28 August 2018

## CONTACT ECHO!

Please keep your subject: **ATTN to ECHO Programme**

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