

Experts advise healthy eating to boost immune system

NATION

Monday, 16 Mar 2020

By DIYANA PFORDTEN



PETALING JAYA: With fears over Covid-19 taking centre stage, nutritionists and health experts say people should revert to the basics of healthy eating, managing stress and exercising to boost their immune system.

Holistic medical practitioner Datuk Dr Rajen Manicka (*pic*) said the type of food and supplements consumed affects one's immune system.

"We believe that a high intake of turmeric, which Indians take daily, and onions, which is rich in quercetin, are foods that boost your immune system," he explained.

Rajen said a high sugar intake will be detrimental to one's health, adding that people should consume more protein and water daily.

"It is important to also take a lot of protein, it doesn't matter what type, be it fish or eggs, because protein is a very important component in the immune system," he said.

After water, glutathione – small protein molecules produced by every single living cell – is the second most important component that the human body needs.

Rajen said people who are low in glutathione have low immune system.

"Older people suffer more because they don't have enough glutathione. You can take supplements that supply the body with glutathione or one that allows the body to make more glutathione.

"We've also done clinical trials, where glutathione is shown to have been able to boost the immune system against the Zika virus," he said.

However, nutritionist Dr Tee E Seong does not recommend taking supplements for the average healthy individual but encourages the practice of traditional dietary guidelines of the food pyramid.

"For people who are sick and have undergone surgery, or old people who cannot eat well, supplements will help.

"But for the average person, the 35-year-olds who are physically active or young children, there is no evidence to say supplements will help," he said.

Tee said should a person need to take supplements, it is best to seek the advice of a nutritionist.

"For vitamins, it does not mean that if we consume more, it will be better for us.

"There are limits of intake for vitamins and minerals, so if you want to take supplements at these times, it is better to talk to a nutritionist," he said.

Commenting on claims of turmeric and garlic intake as a combatant for viruses, Tee said although the spices may be an important source of antioxidants, singling out one food item alone is not going to help fight viruses.

"To boost the immune system, we need to eat more fruits and vegetables.

"The immune system should have been built up over the years, not just now, but we need more antioxidants now, and fruits and vegetables are the best source.

"Colourful vegetables and fruits such as carrot, tomato, colourful grapes and cabbage have a lot of antioxidants," he said.

Tee also noted that antioxidants in vegetables are not destroyed in the process of cooking, unlike the vitamins in them.

Drinking a lot of water, at least eight glasses a day and a balanced diet, is a must to build up the immune system, Tee advised.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Food Science and Technology's Prof Dr Azizah Haji Hamid said another important factor is to reduce stress as it causes poor immunity.

"Everyone has a different approach to dealing with stress.

"We can each do what works for us and it can be as easy as taking a walk, sightseeing or prostration," she said.