

**E**ducators, why is proper nutrition so important for a child's physical and cognitive development?

**Joanna:** Children need to eat healthily so they can maintain the energy required to grow, play and lead an active, happy lifestyle. With the right food, children will fall sick less easily and should they become ill, can recover quicker. They are also less likely to be overweight.

**Siti:** Eating well builds strong bones and muscles, and also affects children's brain development. If a child doesn't receive adequate nutrition, he or she may find it difficult to pay attention or concentrate in class,

impeding the ability to learn.

**How does your centre promote healthy eating through the meals provided, and through the programmes carried out?**

**Siti:** Children's meals are based on the Health Promotion Board's 'My Healthy Plate' guide. We typically serve seasonal fruit, wholemeal bread, and milk as snacks. For lunch, it's a mix of white and brown rice or pasta with meat or fish as well as vegetables and fruits. Recently, we organised a Five-A-Day event in which children dressed up as their favourite fruit or vegetable. The intention was to raise awareness about the importance of

eating five servings of fruits and vegetables every day for a healthy body and mind.

**Joanna:** Milk tends to be the staple for infants. After about six months, we

**Brian Wong**

32, HR BUSINESS PARTNER AND FATHER TO BEVERLY, 1 (DEL-CARE EDU CENTRE)



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//Joanna Poh

start exposing them to a variety of solid foods such as puréed vegetables and organic 'puffs' or finger food. Cooking sessions are held to teach older children how to make healthy meals like sandwiches and fruit salad, and to avoid processed food.

**Parents, are you particular when it comes to your child's food intake at home?**

**Brian:** We haven't given Beverly any sweet treats yet. But she's at an age where she can try a wide

variety of foods, albeit with caution in case of allergies. Examples include cereal or oats for breakfast, rice porridge with blended broccoli for lunch, and fruit purée during dinner. It helps that a lot of dishes we make at home have already been introduced at DEL-Care, so Beverly has no qualms about eating what we prepare.

**Noorlizah:** I do make sure that Aisy eats healthily throughout the day. Treats are allowed in moderation. Normally, he eats a slice each of fruit and bread for breakfast, a bowl of rice or pasta with vegetables and meat for lunch, and a similar meal for dinner. In the afternoon, I let him snack on a low-sugar cookie or a slice of cake, while on

weekends, we sometimes have a family breakfast of *roti prata* or pancakes.

**Physical activity and good hygiene are also essential for children's health. Educators, how are these incorporated into your centre's curriculum?**

**Joanna:** Each class has time allocated for daily indoor gym play, and we have a baby gym for younger infants. Because babies' immune systems are not yet fully developed, they are more prone to illness. With this in mind, the educators pay closer attention to hygiene issues to keep germs and infections at bay. Practices include wearing gloves to change diapers, wiping away mucus or saliva with cotton pads, and

# Brains And Brawn

Parents, educators and a mental health expert explain how nutrition, physical activity, and hygiene all contribute to the development of a healthy, well-rounded child.



**WHAT TO EAT?**

Designed by the Health Promotion Board, 'My Healthy Plate' is a useful number of daily servings from each food group to ensure children get all the nutrients they need. Visit [www.hpb.gov.sg](http://www.hpb.gov.sg) for more information.

**Siti Syana Liyana Binte Daud**

27, KINDERGARTEN TEACHER, SHAW'S @ CARMICHAEL



On Emmett: Shirt & T-shirt Seed Heritage, Jeans Gingersnap On Nadya: Blouse Gingersnap, Headband & Bag Seed Heritage On Sebina: Dress Seed Heritage, Headband Mothercare On Jake: Shirt GAP Kids, Shorts & Bowtie Seed Heritage On Akram: Shirt Cotton On Kids On Brian: Shirt GAP, T-shirt Marks & Spencer On Beverly: Romper GAP Baby, Headband Mothercare On Siti: Jacket Crayon, Top GAP, Bottoms Marks & Spencer Styling Sharon Tan assisted by Jessica Khor Hair & makeup Manisa Tan & Jane Lau

WITH OPTIMAL BRAIN DEVELOPMENT, CHILDREN WILL HAVE BETTER COGNITIVE ABILITIES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES IN SCHOOL, LEADING TO IMPROVED SELF-ESTEEM.

//Dr Jared Ng

using wet wipes to clean infants' hands.

**Siti:** At Shaws, children engage in daily outdoor play and weekly sports sessions. These activities develop their stamina, motor skills and hand-eye coordination, and encourage fair play. We also make sure they wash their hands before eating, as well as after playing outdoors, blowing their nose and using the toilet.

Can you share some tips with parents on how they can get children to adopt



**Joanna Poh**

28, HEAD/INFANT CARE SECTION, DEL-CARE EDU CENTRE

**healthy lifestyle habits?**

**Siti:** Parents are primary role models for their children. If your child sees you eating right and being physically active, he will model your behaviours. Plan fun activities for the whole family, such as cycling or playing hide-and-seek. Get involved in pre-school activities, too. At our centre, parents cover topics like oral hygiene during storytelling sessions. On Father's Day, we invite dads over to play

sports with the children. With their fathers present, children are more willing to participate, and they also see a positive attitude towards health.

**Joanna:** Infants who are not yet mobile can also do physical exercise. For example, while massaging your baby, gently move his arms and legs up and down. Bring a picnic mat with you when going to the park so that baby can

On Joanna: Cardigan GAP, Top Marks & Spencer  
On Sabine: Dress GAP Kids, Sandals Seed Heritage  
On Akram: T-shirt GAP Kids

roll over and move around. Bring along a rattle or ball and move it to his left or right, while encouraging him to reach for it.

It seems children are more likely to get the message that good health is important if parents demonstrate it themselves. Parents, how do you model such behaviour for your child?

**Noorlizah:** My husband and I often take part in centre-based activities with Aisy. He wanted to dress up as a carrot for Five-A-Day, so I sewed a costume for him. We also created a chart explaining the health benefits of carrots and listing different ways to cook them. After the event, Aisy told me all he had learnt about other fruits and vegetables. At home, Aisy and I brush our

teeth together so I can show him the correct way to do it. And I'm proud to say he now washes his hands without any prompting from me!

**Brian:** Since becoming parents, my wife and I have made a conscious effort to eat healthier, especially in front of Beverly. We only eat fast food out of her sight and we've stopped adding salt to our soups. Soon, we will get rid of our 'titbit basket' of sweets. When she's a little older, we plan to fit in regular physical activities like swimming as a family. ♥



**Jared Ng**

38, CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRIST, DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY, INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (IMH)

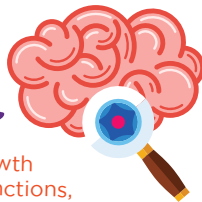


**Noorlizah Binte Jaafar**

36, PRINCIPAL, SHAWS @ CARMICHAEL, AND MOTHER TO AISY AKRAM BIN RASHIDIN, 4 (SHAWS @ CARMICHAEL)

PHOTOS BY MARK LEE & WILSON PANG

# State of Mind



A balanced diet is vital to a child's physical growth and development, and to maintain all bodily functions, including the brain. But the benefits don't end there. "With optimal brain development, children will have better cognitive abilities and academic performances in school, leading to improved self-esteem," says Dr Jared Ng, Consultant Psychiatrist, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health (IMH).

Dr Ng characterises a mentally, socially and emotionally healthy pre-schooler as "someone who is curious to learn and keen to explore, takes the initiative, and is able to enjoy himself or herself without feeling inhibited or guilty". Young children may exhibit mood changes or test their behavioural limits, which is part and parcel of growing up. However, if they display symptoms such as inconsolable crying, difficulty sleeping, refusal to go to school or aggression in school, it could be a sign of deeper mental health problems caused by a medical or developmental condition, or by issues at home.

To ensure children get help early, parents and educators need to stay in constant communication and inform each other if they are concerned or notice any warning signs. IMH's Child Guidance Clinic and the KK Women's and Children's Hospital provide mental health assessment for pre-schoolers. Plans are also underway for IMH to expand its Response Early Intervention and Assessment in Community Mental Health (REACH) programme from primary schools to pre-schools. ([www.imh.com.sg/clinical/page.aspx?id=1635](http://www.imh.com.sg/clinical/page.aspx?id=1635))

The key to raising happy, well-adjusted children, says Dr Ng, is to "let them feel loved, trusted, understood and valued even at a very young age". For parents, that means giving children time and freedom to play, and joining in as well to spend quality time together. Pre-schools should also provide plenty of opportunities for children to have fun and engage in non-academic interests, rather than focus solely on learning.

## LAYING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR BETTER HEALTH



On 24 April 2016, parents and educators of pre-schoolers showed up at Anchorvale Community Club with one purpose in mind: to suggest and discuss possible ideas for children to embrace healthy living. The session marked the start of an eight-week public consultation exercise on NurtureSG, a new inter-agency taskforce jointly set up by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education.

The NurtureSG taskforce aims to enhance health outcomes among children, such as reducing the prevalence of risk factors for chronic diseases like diabetes and promoting overall well-being from an early age. Using feedback garnered from the community during engagement sessions, strategies will be developed to encourage children and youth to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles.

