

EATING HEALTHY

Caregiver Guide to Helping
Persons with Intellectual Disability
Combat Obesity



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INTRODUCTION

Peter has mild intellectual disability. At age 39, Peter is obese. He has diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Peter's father passed away when he was 7 years old. Today, Peter lives with his younger sister and mother, who works long hours as a coffeeshop dishwasher. His sister is his main caregiver. She gives him his daily insulin injections and makes sure he takes his medication. Peter goes to a day activity centre 5 days a week. Fried chicken is his favorite food and he drinks 5 bottles of coke a day. What can he do to improve his health?



INTRODUCTION

Stories like Peter's are not uncommon. People with intellectual disability (PWID) tend to have poor health. This is usually because of a combination of factors such as co-occurring genetic or developmental conditions, communication difficulties and lifestyle factors.

For example, people with Down Syndrome often have heart defects, hearing deficits, and vision problems. The communication difficulties experienced by PWID limit their ability to access health services. In addition, public health education often does not cater to their unique learning needs. Finally, research has shown that PWID tend to eat more food high in fats and sugar. They snack more, eat less fruits and vegetables, and have insufficient physical activity.



INTRODUCTION

In addition to the above factors that increase the risk of a person experiencing poor health, it is known that PWID tend to age prematurely around the age of around 40–50 years old, further increasing their risk of disease and disability. It is also at this time that the health of their aging caregiver may affect their ability to care for their loved one, thus also contributing to poor health of the individual with ID.

This booklet is the first in a series of educational material that aims to help you, as a caregiver, manage the health of your loved one with ID. We have chosen to begin with the topic of obesity as it is a very common condition has far-ranging implications for many aspects of health.



OBESITY

Being overweight or obese is common in PWID. Up to 79.7% of PWID were found to be overweight or obese in a large research study in Ireland in 2017.

A person's healthy weight is determined by his or her body mass index (BMI). BMI is calculated using the formula below:

$$\text{BMI} = \text{weight (kg)} / \text{height}^2 \text{ (m}^2\text{)}$$

BMI TABLE

NORMAL	OVERWEIGHT	OBESE
18.5 - 22.9	23 - 24.9	25 ABOVE

OBESITY

Whether it be work, leisure or just intimate moments with family and friends, a healthy weight enables us to do what is meaningful to us. On the other hand, being overweight may keep us from meaningful activities and people we love because of chronic disease, pain and mobility problems.

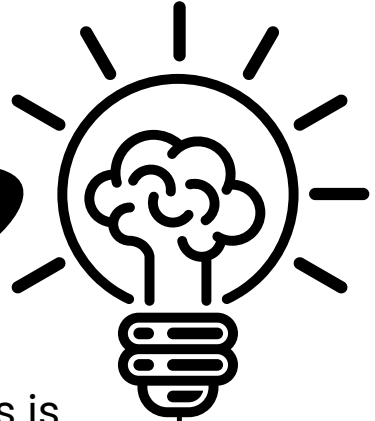
Overeating and eating a diet high in fat and sugar increases the risk of a person becoming overweight or obese. This is especially so if the individual has low levels of physical activity. Both these conditions are often present in PWID.

This booklet will provide guidelines on meal and food portion sizes that one should consume. In addition, it will describe some strategies that might help PWID make the necessary changes towards healthy eating and optimal weight!



OBESITY

**DID YOU
KNOW?**



80% of weight loss is usually achieved through changes to diet, while only 20% is due to increased physical activity!

Therefore, **eating healthy** is *critical* to managing obesity.

INTERESTING FACT

HEALTHY EATING

Our source of energy and nutrients come from 3 food groups:

1. **Carbohydrates** are broken down into sugar to provide energy for daily activities. They are **energy food**. Examples of carbohydrates are rice, noodles or bread.



2. **Protein** builds our muscles and repairs our tissues. It is **body-building food**. Examples of protein are fish, lean meat and egg.



3. **Vegetables and fruits** are rich in fibre, vitamins and minerals, which are essential for a strong immune system to protect against disease. They are **protection food**.



HEALTHY EATING PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Eat a variety of food

We need to eat from all 3 food groups.

The Healthy Plate is a good guide for how much we should eat from each food group. According to the Healthy Plate, each meal should consist of:

- 1 portion of carbohydrates
- 1 portion of protein
- 1 portion of vegetable
- 1 portion of fruit



Another way to describe a healthy meal would be to fill:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ plate with carbohydrate
- $\frac{1}{4}$ plate with protein
- $\frac{1}{2}$ plate with vegetables and fruit

HEALTHY EATING PRINCIPLES

Principle 2: Eat regularly, Avoid snacking

3 regular meals a day is sufficient to provide a person with all the energy and nutrition needed. Using the Healthy Plate as a guide to help prevent overeating while ensuring that the meal is satisfying.

Snacking between meals should be avoided. Eating regularly and eating enough fibre helps keep one feeling full between meals and reduces the need to snack. However, we recognize that snacks are a common part of daily routines for PWID. Snacks can be made healthier by:

- Keeping portion size SMALL
- Choosing snacks that are lower in sugar, salt and fat.

Examples of healthier snacks include:



Fruit & nuts
(handful)



2 oat
crackers



1 tub low-fat
yoghurt

HEALTHY EATING PRINCIPLES

Principle 3: Drink Water

Water is needed for many bodily functions such as building new cells, removing waste from the body and keeping joints smooth. It is recommended that a person drinks **6 to 8 glasses** of water a day.

Drinking water can help with weight management too. Drinking a glass of water before meals can temporarily reduce hunger pangs and prevent overeating.

Flavoured drinks are not recommended because they contain a lot of sugar. If a person with ID is used to drinking flavoured drinks, you can encourage drinking water by adding flavour through fruit (e.g., lemon or orange slices) or herbs (e.g., mint or lemongrass) while avoiding added sugar.



HEALTHY EATING PRINCIPLES

Principle 4: Reduce added sugar, salt and fat

Consuming too much sugar, salt and fat is associated with obesity and chronic conditions.

Food can still be tasty and healthy! Try adding the following to savoury dishes to enhance flavour without the additional salt:

- **Spices** e.g., pepper, cinnamon, turmeric, fennel
- **Herbs** e.g., coriander, basil, garlic, ginger, chilli, kaffir lime leaf, lemongrass



Artificial sweeteners like stevia are alternatives to sugar. Honey and maple syrup contain sugar but take longer to digest. These, together with natural sweeteners like dates and monk fruit are also good alternatives to white cane sugar.

Reducing fat in one's diet can be done by avoiding deep fried food. Food that has a lot of butter and cream are also high in fat content and should be eaten at a minimum.



HEALTHY EATING

**AT THE
HAWKER CENTRE**



HEALTHY EATING @ HAWKER CENTRE

Encourage your child to eat from the “**economy rice**” or “**nasi padang**” stall because it allows the most choice. Apply the healthy eating principles by:

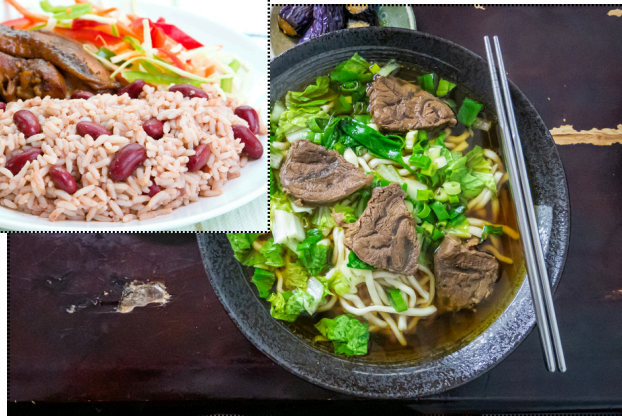
- Choosing two vegetables and one protein (e.g., meat, fish, tofu)
- Asking for a smaller portion of rice
- Choosing brown rice
- Choosing steamed, boiled or stir-fried dishes (less oil)
- Requesting for less or no gravy (less salt)



HEALTHY EATING @ HAWKER CENTRE

If your child chooses to eat from other stalls, healthy eating principles can still be applied by:

- Asking for smaller portions of rice or noodles
- Choosing the wholegrain (brown) rice or noodle option
- Choosing 'soup' over 'dry' options (e.g., noodles, yong tau fu)
- Asking for more vegetables
- Asking for less oil and salt
- Avoid drinking all the soup



HEALTHY EATING @ HAWKER CENTRE



When it comes to drinks, encourage your child to bring a water bottle and drink before the meal starts.

If they would like to order a drink, encourage ordering drinks that have less or no sugar. For example, 'kopi kosong', 'teh siew dai' and 'Coke Zero' are preferred over full sugar versions of the same drinks.



HEALTHY EATING

AT HOME



HEALTHY EATING @ HOME

Preparing meals at home allows the most control over meal size, food portions and the amount of sugar, salt and oil that are added to the meal.

Caring for a person with ID is tiring and time consuming. Often, resources are limited too. Thus, regular meal preparation might seem an added chore! However, healthy meal preparation does not need to take long hours. In addition, healthy and tasty meals do not need to be expensive.

This section describes some time-saving and cost-saving cooking ideas!



HEALTHY EATING @ HOME

Time-Saving Cooking Ideas

Steaming food is a method of cooking that uses little to no oil. Stackable steaming devices allows cooking more than one dish at a time, thus saving you time.



Using a **slow cooker** to stew food is another time-saving measure as the raw ingredients can be put into the slow cooker overnight for a meal the next day, or in the morning in preparation for dinner.

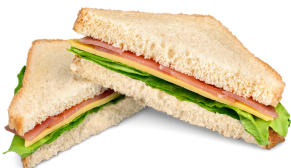
HEALTHY EATING @ HOME

Time-Saving Cooking Ideas

Stir-frying uses much less oil than deep-frying, and air-frying even less. Using less oil when cooking makes cleaning up after much quicker and again will save you time.



Another time-saving measure would be to eat food that requires little to nil cooking, like **salads and sandwiches**. In addition, preparing larger quantities of food in advance, then **freezing** them in smaller portions for heating up on another day also allows for quick meal preparation.



HEALTHY EATING @ HOME

Cost-Saving Cooking Ideas

With the rising inflation in Singapore, eating out is becoming increasingly expensive. Preparing even just one meal a day instead of buying it will save money.

Meat alternatives: Meat dishes are often the most expensive part of a meal. Alternatives like tempeh, tofu, eggs and canned sardines are equally good sources of protein and budget-friendly too!



Buy in bulk: Buying staples like rice in larger quantities, and even fruit and vegetables by bags instead of single pieces costs less.



HEALTHY EATING @ HOME

Cost-Saving Cooking Ideas

Supermarket savings: In some supermarkets, there are sections selling fruit that are '**ugly**' because they've been slightly bruised or getting close to being over ripe. They are often sold cheaply but remain perfectly good to eat! Going to supermarkets **later in the day** may save you money as the price of some items will be '**reduced to clear**'.



Frozen food can be cheaper than fresh food. It is worthwhile to compare prices.

However, avoid frozen processed food like nuggets seaweed chicken and fries. Consider frozen meats, mixed vegetables and dumplings.



HEALTHY EATING @ HOME

Hopefully the above suggestions have been helpful in providing ideas for healthy, time-saving and cost-effective meal preparation.

A final note on meal preparation would be a reminder to look out for the “healthier choice” and “Nutrigrade A or B” symbol on items in the supermarket. These symbols indicate that the food items are lower in sugar, salt and/or fat, higher in wholegrains, calcium or trans-fat free.



DIET CHANGE



FACILITATING DIET CHANGE

Helping PWID make the dietary changes necessary for weight loss and the maintenance of a healthy weight is a challenge, especially if they are overweight or obese.

As mentioned earlier, routines are often essential to helping PWID manage day to day living. Changing a routine is difficult and might be met with resistance. Furthermore, some individuals may present with behaviours of concern. Food is often used to manage such behaviours, contributing to overeating and obesity.



FACILITATING DIET CHANGE

Strategies to Facilitate Diet Change

1. Explain the reason for weight loss

PWID can often understand more than is assumed by most. Helping the individual understand why diet change is needed may make him or her more receptive to the changes. Images may help with the individual's understanding. To this end, IDHealth has produced "Easy read" material that explains healthy eating.

2. Start small, proceed gradually

For example, if an individual usually eats 3 cookies as a snack every afternoon, replace just one of those cookies with an oat cracker as a start and increase over time. Another example would be to start by replacing just one spoonful of white rice with brown rice, increasing the brown rice proportion over time instead of replacing the entire bowl at once.



FACILITATING DIET CHANGE

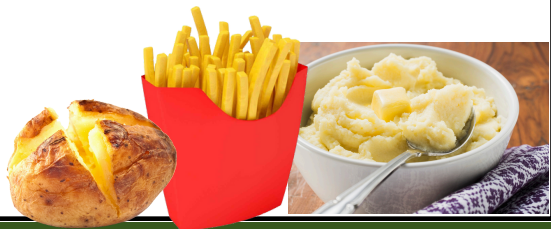
Strategies to Facilitate Diet Change

3. Pair new food with preferred food

Introducing a new food is less anxiety-inducing if the individual knows that he will get to eat something he or she likes after. The preferred food acts as a reward for trying the new one. Over time, the preferred item can be weaned off.

4. Explore healthier options of the same food or food group

For example, if the individual with ID loves eating French fries, offering potatoes baked or mashed would be a healthier option. Instead of deep-fried chicken wings, offer air-fried ones. Rice, noodles and pasta can be found in wholegrain versions.



FACILITATING DIET CHANGE

Strategies to Facilitate Diet Change

5. Get creative!

A little creativity can go a long way! For example, an individual's routine may involve eating 2 bowls of rice a day. He refuses to reduce any amount of it. To get around this situation, using smaller bowls would reduce the rice portion but maintain the routine of eating 2 bowls for the individual. Slicing up food into portions may also give the illusion of greater quantity than actual.



4. Get help!

Dieticians, nutritionists and speech therapists have expertise in various aspects of weight management and diet change. You may consider consulting them if you need more information or support in facilitating diet change for someone with ID.



CONCLUSION

Peter needs help to change his lifestyle, beginning with his diet. First, his sister could use images to explain how losing weight would help Peter feel better. Next, she could begin by encouraging Peter to make small changes such as replacing regular coke with diet coke. Instead of drinking 5 bottles of coke, he could drink 4. She could also replace fried chicken with grilled chicken. Setting small weight goals, having Peter weigh himself regularly and rewarding Peter when he achieves them, may help motivate him to stick with the diet change.

Lifestyle change takes time and effort, but it pays back in good health and well-being. We encourage you to help your loved one make the change!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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