



## School Nutrition Programs MALAYSIA REPORT

This report provides an overview of school nutrition programs in Malaysia. In Malaysia, there are generally two categories of schools; i.e. government schools and private schools. The majority (>98%) of schoolchildren attend government schools, with a much smaller percentage (usually from the higher income group) attending private schools. Most government schools run in two sessions: morning session (7.30 am – 1.00 pm) and afternoon session (1.00 pm – 6.30 pm), while private schools are run in one session (8.00 – 3.30 pm). Another category is boarding schools, which cater for secondary school-aged children.

The school nutrition programs which will be discussed in this report include:

- Rancangan Makanan Tambahan (RMT)
- School Milk Program
- Private Schools' Meal Plans
- Boarding Schools' Meal Plans
- Nutrition Education Programs

### **Rancangan Makanan Tambahan (RMT)**

In Malaysia, the school-feeding program is called *Rancangan Makanan Tambahan* (RMT) and literally means 'additional food plan'. The RMT program is provided only to primary school children (aged 6 – 12 years) from poor families. It is not meant to replace food served at home, but to provide extra nourishment for children from poor families. The RMT program is managed by the School Division of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

In year 2004, it is estimated that approximately 38% of primary schoolchildren are given the RMT, costing the government approximately RM124million. Food is served during recess time (10.30 a.m. for morning session, and 3.30pm for afternoon session) and provides 1/4 to 1/3 of daily requirements. Twenty standard menus are provided, whereby school canteen management may select five menus for the five schooldays and rotating the menu on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Menus are based on Malaysian common foods, and may be modified to suit the local situation and children's likes and dislikes. See Appendix 1 for sample menu.

The RMT program has improved the nutritional and health status of poor children. Improvements in immunity to infectious diseases as well as school performance have also been observed. On the other hand, weaknesses include decision-making on the part of the school as to which child qualifies to be on the RMT program. Other problems include acceptance of food served, e.g. fruits or vegetables, are sometimes omitted from the menu by canteen operators because "when we serve them, they children don't eat them".



Children who do not qualify for this program either bring food from home or buy foods sold in school canteens. In the recent tsunami disaster, which affected the northern regions of Peninsular Malaysia, the Ministry of Education immediately undertakes upon itself to provide the RMT to all schoolchildren affected in an effort to ward off malnutrition in the aftermath of the disaster.

### **School Milk Programme**

Besides the RMT, there is also a School Milk Programme, under which there are two schemes, one providing milk for free to poor children, and the other providing subsidized milk to other children (whereby a nominal fee had to be paid).

The School Milk Programme is geared towards cultivating milk drinking habit among schoolchildren, and thereby improving calcium (as well as other minerals and vitamins) intake amongst these children. This programme is carried out in collaboration with milk industries, and cost the Ministry of Education approximately RM16million in year 2004.

### **Boarding Schools' Meal Plans**

The meal plans for boarding schools are coordinated at state level by the State Education Departments. The school meal operators then plan their own one- or two-week-cycle menus based on the meal plans provided by the State Education Department.

Most boarding schools in Malaysia are at secondary school level and cater to children aged 12 years and above. The children are served three main meals, namely breakfast, lunch and dinner; plus three snacks, namely morning and afternoon snacks, and supper. The main problems faced include limited acceptance of food due to boredom with and predictability of the rather short cycle menus. This may be overcome with a more creative and longer-cycle menu.

### **Private Schools' Meal Plans**

In Malaysia, private schools have differing hours from government schools; where private schools operate for longer hours and in one session only (8.00 am – 3.30 pm). As such, the school lunch is considered an important meal for the children.

Many private schools have specially catered meal plans for their students. However, some schools allow the children to select and buy their own lunch. Both methods have their own pros and cons. While well-planned catered lunches will ensure that children obtain healthy, nutritious meals; a less well-planned one may induce boredom and non-acceptance of foods served. On the other hand, in buying their own lunches, children with sufficient nutrition knowledge and good eating habits may be able to select healthy and well-balanced lunches, while others may not be able to do so.



Nevertheless, foods served in private schools tend to have more variety and may be more “westernised” than foods served in government schools. The menus are usually on a one-month cycle, and are revised regularly to reduce boredom. A sample menu for catered meal plans in a local private school is shown in Appendix 2.

### **Nutrition Education Programmes in Schools**

Officially, nutrition education is incorporated into primary and secondary school curriculum in various subjects, including Physical and Health Education, Malay and English language, as well as Science subjects. Besides that, there are currently a few nutrition education programmes carried out by various institutions and organizations which undertakes to teach young children good eating habits and healthy food choices.

The “Healthy Schools Programme”, is one such project that involves the Ministry of Education, Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Association of the Study of Obesity, and support from the industry. This programme incorporates a segment where foods sold in school canteen are evaluated, and the canteen administrators given training to provide healthier options. Besides that, educational modules, songs related to healthy eating, interactive CDs on healthy eating and food pyramid are also used to educate schoolchildren on the importance of healthy eating and physical activity on health.

Several other programs include the “Healthy Lifestyle in Children” program which was initiated by medical and health researchers from various universities in Malaysia. The group developed several modules for healthy living, including nutrition, physical activity, and anti-smoking, targeted at primary and secondary schoolchildren. The modules have now been handed over to the Ministry of Education to be considered for implementation in national schools.

Report prepared by:  
**Poh Bee Koon, PhD**  
*Associate Professor*  
Department of Nutrition & Dietetics  
Faculty of Allied Health Sciences  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
50300 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia  
Tel : 603-4040 5686, Fax : 603-2693 2688  
Email: [pbkoon@medic.ukm.my](mailto:pbkoon@medic.ukm.my)

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**APPENDIX 1**

**Rancangan Makanan Tambahan – Sample Menu**

**Monday**

- Fried Mihun (rice vermicelli), with vegetables and tofu
- Papaya, 1 slice

**Tuesday**

- Rice porridge, with meat and peanuts
- Banana, 1 whole

**Wednesday**

- Roti canai, with sardine gravy
- Orange, 1 whole

**Thursday**

- Nasi lemak (Rice cooked in coconut milk, served with anchovies, peanuts, slices of cucumber)
- Guava, 1 slice

**Friday**

- Curry Mee (wheat noodles served with chicken curry and beansprouts)
- Watermelon, 1 slice



**APPENDIX 2**

**School Lunch (Private Schools) – Sample Menu**

**Monday**

- Rice, served with
  - o Spinach soup
  - o Chicken in Mild Curry Sauce
  - o Egg Omelette
  - o Stir Fried Chinese Cabbage
- Banana, 1 whole
- Mango drink

**Tuesday**

- Cream of mushroom soup
- Chicken nuggets
- Mashed potatoes
- Garlic bun
- Watermelon, 1 slice
- Orange drink

**Wednesday**

- Rice, served with
  - o Cabbage, carrot and onion soup
  - o Deep Fried Fish Fillet in Lemon Sauce
  - o Beancurd in Oyster & Soya Sauce
  - o Stir Fried Bean Sprouts with Light Soya Sauce
- Honeydew melon, 1 slice
- Ribena drink

**Thursday**

- Cream of mushroom soup
- Spirali with Mushroom Bolognese Sauce
- French Fries
- Papaya, 1 slice
- Mango drink

**Friday (half day, lighter lunch)**

- Fried noodles, with vegetables and chicken pieces
- Curry puff
- Starfruit, 1 slice
- Orange drink