

More Younger Malaysians Prone To Stroke



DR BALWANT SINGH BAINSâ€¦ "Unless we change our lifestyle, especially the teh tarik culture, the occurrence of stroke in the next coming generation is going to be very, very high indeed." Pix: Rushdan Abdul Manan

By Azman Ujang

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 2 (Bernama) -- Malaysians enter the New Year with a warning that the number of people prone to stroke in this country is alarming and their ages getting younger and younger.

And consultant physiotherapist Dr Balwant Singh Bains, who counts VVIP's and even members of the royalty from the Middle East as among his stroke patients, blames it on the "teh tarik" phenomenon and Malaysia being a very high meat-consuming nation.

"Unless we change our lifestyle, especially the teh tarik culture, the occurrence of stroke in the next coming generation is going to be very, very high indeed," Dr Bains told Bernama.

Expressing concern over the high intake of teh tarik, the main ingredient of which is condensed milk, he said: " Diabetes and high blood pressure are the biggest killers in the country. A person who has diabetes and high blood pressure is like a time-bomb and they are many walking time-bombs in Malaysia waiting to explode anytime".

Dr Bains, who runs physiotherapy clinics for strokees here, reserved some strong words for teh tarik, the condensed milk tea which is arguably the favourite drink of Malaysians judging from the mushrooming of teh tarik stalls in just about every nook and corner of the country.

"Today stroke is taking a very big toll on our society. Malaysia is the only country where condensed milk is highly used in tea-drinking and condensed milk has a very, very high sugar content," he said.

Dr Bains said this was not the case in Thailand and Indonesia, which he described as countries with coffee-minded people who take their coffee without condensed milk.

"But Malaysians are without a doubt the biggest consumers of condensed milk per population in the world....so the incidence of diabetes in this country is quite high.

He said in Malaysia, children were exposed to teh tarik at a very early age and this was "unfortunate".

"So much so that they don't really have a proper breakfast. Malaysians in general, too, at 8 or 9 o'clock are having their teh tarik as the basic thing. Sometimes they even eat white bread spread with condensed milk. Condensed milk is actually a killer," he added.

"That's a very, very sad thing to see, Malaysians starting teh tarik at a very young age and this has become a culture. I would say generally speaking, the level of health consciousness among our people is still very low.

"What we don't have in this country is a tea-pot culture. A tea-pot culture is a culture developed by drinking Chinese tea, for example, or drinking tea or coffee without condensed milk," he said.

Dr Bains said if the people were not educated on the dangers of their existing lifestyle, especially at the school-level, "then we are having a serious problem in our hands".

Another factor is the very high meat consumption among Malaysians.

"We are very heavy meat-eaters, no matter what meat you are talking about. Malaysians eat meat practically everyday," he said.

Added to this is the high consumption of santan (coconut milk) which is high in cholesterol and which, said Dr Bains, would lead to a lot of other health problems.

Dr Bains, who has a PhD in psychology, also urged the Education Ministry to review the existing approach to physical education and sports in schools.

"Our approach to sports in schools is not matured. Suddenly we have a season for cross-country. No stretching done for the children involved, no pre-conditioning of the children done, many who were not fit to run cross-country had to run long distance.

"We cannot go on like this, because there'll be lots of injuries taking place here, like tearing of ankles and knees. Many children doing cross-country did not even have breakfast," he said.

Dr Bains said many teachers undertaking physical education were not trained for the task.

"There's no proper guidance on physical education and I think our approach to sports is still primitive," he said.

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