





Dato' Dr Aljafri bin Abdul Majid Chairman

Berita Yayasan Jantung Malaysia has always been a strong proponent to raising awareness about the impact of cardiovascular health and the significant effects that heart-related problems have on both people and the country at large. In an era where heart disease is becoming more and more prevalent worldwide, the upcoming holiday season emphasises how important it is for us to understand the vital role that diet plays in protecting our hearts.

There is no denying the link between cardiovascular health and the foods we eat. Our nutritional intake has the power to either promote heart health and wellbeing or act as catalysts for the development of various different heart conditions. With the holidays season around the corner, it is critical to consider our dietary decisions while enjoying the celebrations.

The holiday season is often a time for happiness and time with family. Unfortunately, this also marks a time of the year where many individuals overindulge with their nutrition. Although the temptation of unhealthy meals may present difficulties, making a deliberate effort to include heart-healthy foods may have a significant impact on

Navigating Nutrition Choices During the Holidays to Champion Heart Health



our heart health in the future. So, it is important to ensure that you choose nutrient-rich foods, limit salt and sugar intake, and savour the joy of the season in moderation. By making mindful choices, we can ensure that our hearts remain the centre of celebration.

As we navigate the nutritional landscape of the holidays, let us also take a moment to reflect on the year gone by and look forward to the promising future of Berita Yayasan Jantung Malaysia.

In our pursuit of a heart-healthy Malaysia, we recognise the potential and challenges that lie ahead as we look back on the accomplishments of the last year. Yayasan Jantung Malaysia has come a long way thanks to the commitment of its members and the community's support. We hope that a fresh feeling of purpose emerges with

the start of a new year, where heart health will be highly valued by the general population. Exciting initiatives and collaborations are on the horizon, with the goal of enabling every Malaysian to have access to and achieve heart health. As we embrace the challenges of the future, we are committed to pioneering initiatives that will have a lasting impact on the cardiovascular well-being of our nation.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to all contributors and supporters who have played a pivotal role in making this publication possible. As we bid farewell to the current year, let us usher in the new year with a commitment to our heart health and the well-being of our nation. Together, let's champion heart health for a vibrant and healthier Malaysia.



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Nourishing the Heart – A Holistic Approach to Cardiovascular Well-being

In this issue of Berita Yayasan Jantung Malaysia, we explore the heart health with an emphasis on proactive preventative approaches. Understanding the different factors, especially the influence that a healthy diet and lifestyle has on heart health, is crucial to empowering individuals to take charge of their overall well-being.

In our first feature article, we unravel the genetic complexities of familial hypercholesterolemia, a condition that significantly influences heart health. Beyond understanding its genetic roots, we provide insights into the different signs and symptoms of familial hypercholesterolemia and preventive strategies for affected individuals to reduce the impact of the condition in regards to heart health.

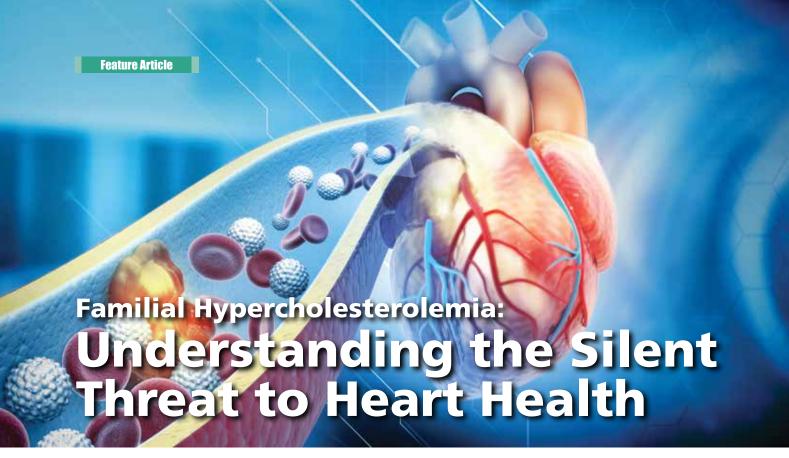
Our second feature article delves into the essential role of vitamin D in heart health and explores its relationship with cardiovascular well-being. The article also provides practical tips to maximise vitamin D intake in order to nurture a healthy heart.

Menopause, a natural transition for women, brings unique considerations for heart health. Our third feature article navigates the intricate relationship between menopause and cardiovascular well-being, particularly the protective role of oestrogen in maintaining healthy blood vessels. The article also offers tips for postmenopausal women to safeguard their heart health during this transformative phase.

It is important to recognise that our daily nutritional and lifestyle choices shape our heart health. It's about more than avoiding unhealthy habits; it's about embracing positive ones. Each small step, whether choosing nutritious foods, staying active, or making informed health decisions, contributes to the overall well-being of our hearts.

Embark on a journey of proactive heart care, making it an integral part of our daily routine rather than a chore. Together, we can work towards nourishing our hearts, making informed decisions, and a living life filled with heart-healthy habits.

Dato' Dr Aljafri bin Abdul Majid



In a technological age where our knowledge of genetics is expanding, recognising the influence that our genetics have on our overall health and well-being has become increasingly important. Familial hypercholesterolemia is a genetic condition that is often overlooked and undetected and can influence our heart health. Therefore, it is important for individuals to consider and understand this condition.

Understanding Genetics and Familial Hypercholesterolemia

The genetics of each individual is unique. Just like how certain people have different hair and eye colours, our genes also have small variations and differences compared to others. In the case of familial hypercholesterolemia (FH), certain variations in our genes can influence the amount of cholesterol in our blood.

FH describes a group of genetic variations that causes an increase in the amount of cholesterol in the blood. More specifically, an elevation of the "bad cholesterol" (low-density lipoprotein), which can significantly impact one's cardiovascular heart health. In fact, studies have identified over 1600 unique genetic variations in individuals with FH. These changes can affect cardiovascular health in various ways, and they can range from mild to severe.

How Common is Familial Hypercholesterolemia?

Global estimates of the prevalence of FH has determined it to be between 1 in 300 and 1 in 500, which approximately equates to over 10 million affected individuals worldwide. However, the prevalence of FH can vary significantly between different demographics. For example, studies have found that FH is more common in certain races (e.g. Finnish, Afrikaners, Lebanese, French Canadians, etc.) and ages (i.e. those aged 60 to 69 years old).

From a local perspective, a recent Malaysian study conducted in 2021 found that the prevalence of FH was around 1 in 100, which is higher than the global prevalence. Interestingly, this finding is six times higher from what was recorded 20 years ago, which highlights the importance of understanding this disease.

Recognising Familial Hypercholesterolemia

Due to the wide range of genetic variations, the signs and symptoms of FH can range from mild to severe. The general symptoms of FH are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: General Symptoms of Familial Hypercholesterolemia

General Symptoms of Familial Hypercholesterolemia

• No symptoms during early life (late onset)

 Deposits of cholesterol on the skin of the hands, elbows, knees, ankles, eyelids, and tendons

• Chest pains at a young age

 Sores on the toes that do not heal

 Cramping of the calve muscles when walking

In addition to this, it is important to understand that we have two copies of a particular gene – one from your mother and one from your father. In FH, you can have one copy (heterozygous) or two copies (homozygous) of the gene variation causing the condition. This can also influence the severity of symptoms.

Familial Hypercholesterolemia: Impact on Heart Health

As mentioned earlier, FH can significantly affect one's heart health. The increase in low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol in the blood can increase the risk of certain cardiovascular diseases, particularly through the development of atherosclerosis. For example, studies have shown that individuals with FH have a four-fold increase in risk of coronary artery disease.

To make matters worse, individuals with FH are at a higher risk for developing certain complications such as heart attacks or death at an early age, strokes, and the development of severe heart diseases (e.g. congestive heart failure, aortic stenosis, peripheral arterial disease, etc.).

Preventing Familial Hypercholesterolemia

FH is a genetic disease, meaning that there are not many options to prevent the condition once you have it. However, there are options for affected individuals to help reduce the risks of developing severe conditions by controlling the amount of LDL cholesterol in the blood.

Attend regular health screenings. Routine health screenings can help affected individuals monitor blood cholesterol levels. In addition to this, health screenings can help those who have not been diagnosed, receive an early diagnosis. This can allow for timely interventions to help reduce the risk of heart problems associated with FH.

Ensure a healthy nutrition. Nutrition can significant affect the amount of LDL cholesterol found in the blood. To ensure healthy nutrition, it is important to eat a healthy diet according to the Malaysian Food Pyramid 2020 and to use the Malaysian Healthy Plate as a guide. In certain cases, special diets may be prescribed by a doctor or dietician.

Strive to have an active lifestyle. Regular physical activity can help individuals achieve a healthy body weight, which in turn can also help reduce levels of LDL cholesterol in the blood.

Medications. When lifestyle changes alone are unable to control blood cholesterol levels, medications may be useful. There are numerous medications that can help reduce the levels of LDL cholesterol in the blood. To learn more, speak with your doctor.

Conclusion

In a world where our understanding of health is increasingly influenced by our understanding of genetics, it is critical to understand conditions such as familial hypercholesterolemia (FH). FH may increase blood levels of "bad" (LDL) cholesterol, which may have an effect on a person's heart health. FH can be managed with routine medical exams, a balanced diet, an active lifestyle, and medication as necessary. With this knowledge, we can ensure that our hearts have a healthier future.



Malaysia is geographically located near the equator. Meaning theoretically, Malaysians should be getting enough sun exposure to produce vitamin D and should be less prone to vitamin D deficiency. Unfortunately, this is not the case as studies have shown that Malaysia bears a high prevalence of vitamin D deficiency, with approximately 1 in every 2 Malaysians estimated to have vitamin D levels below normal range.

What is Vitamin D?

Vitamin D is an important compound that naturally exists in 5 different forms. The "vitamin D" we all commonly refer to is known as vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), which is produced in our body with

Fun Fact!

Sunlight contains three different types of sun rays, which have different amounts of energy.

Type of Sun Ray	Strength (Energy)
Ultraviolet A (UVA)	Highest*
Ultraviolet B (UVB)	Intermediate (Carries the energy required for vitamin D production in the body)
Ultraviolet C (UVC)	Lowest

*UVA has the highest penetrative power and is dangerous when in long exposures and without sun protection help from sunlight. Another important form is vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol), which comes from our diet. These are the two primary sources of vitamin D available to humans.

The Importance of Vitamin D

Vitamin D is involved in numerous physiological functions. One of its primary roles is to help the body absorb and break down calcium from our bones. It also helps maintain the balance of calcium in our blood and contributes to the hardening and density of our bones. Although it is less known about, vitamin D also has functions beyond bone health. Studies have indicated that vitamin D may also play an important role in protecting our cardiovascular system.

Risk Factors of Vitamin D Deficiency

- Low dietary intake. A major source of vitamin D is through dietary intake of foods like oily fish and mushrooms. Therefore, individuals who have a low intake of these foods are at a higher risk of developing a vitamin D deficiency.
- **Insufficient exposure to sunlight.** Exposure to sunlight is important for our body's to create vitamin D. Individuals who excessively stay indoors are more likely to have less vitamin D produced in their bodies and are therefore more prone to developing a vitamin D deficiency.
- Excessive sunlight protection. Sun protection measures such as sunscreen, protective clothing, hats, and umbrellas can also affect one's exposure

to sunlight. Although it is important to protect yourself from long exposure to the sun, excessive usage of these protective measures may reduce one's ability to produce vitamin D.

• **Environmental factors.** Any environmental factors that affect the ability for sunlight to reach an individual can also affect one's ability to synthesise vitamin D in their body. This can include things like air pollution and weather conditions.

Sources of Vitamin D

Although our bodies produce the majority of the vitamin D we require, there are also various other sources of vitamin D that can be obtained through our diet (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Sources of vitamin D3 and D2

Vitamin D3 (Cholecalciferol)

- Sunlight (particularly Ultraviolet B-type)
- Fish liver oil
- Fatty fish (e.g. whitefish, salmon, tuna, etc.)
- Eggs

Vitamin D2 (Ergocalciferol)

- Yeast
- Mushrooms (e.g., chanterelles, shiitake)

Fortified functional foods (e.g. plant-based milks, cow's milk, orange juice, cereals, etc.)



In the past decade, fortification has become another major source of dietary vitamin D. In this case, fortification refers to when vitamin D compounds are added to foods that do not naturally contain the vitamin. This category of food is known as functional foods, which commonly encompass products in the dairy and cereal aisle of your favourite grocery stores (e.g. cereal, muesli, oats, milk, yoghurt, etc)!

Vitamin D and the Heart: What's the Relationship?

Recent studies have suggested a possible protective function of vitamin D to the heart, targeting specifically the prevention of high blood pressure (hypertension) and blockage of the artery (atherosclerosis). Although the exact scientific mechanism of how this works is yet to be understood, some explanations have been proposed.

Vitamin D and Hypertension

• Vitamin D may play a role in reducing the production of "contraction signals" to the blood vessels. Less contraction of the blood vessels means less narrowing of the blood passageway, therefore reducing the pressure within the vessels as the blood flows through.

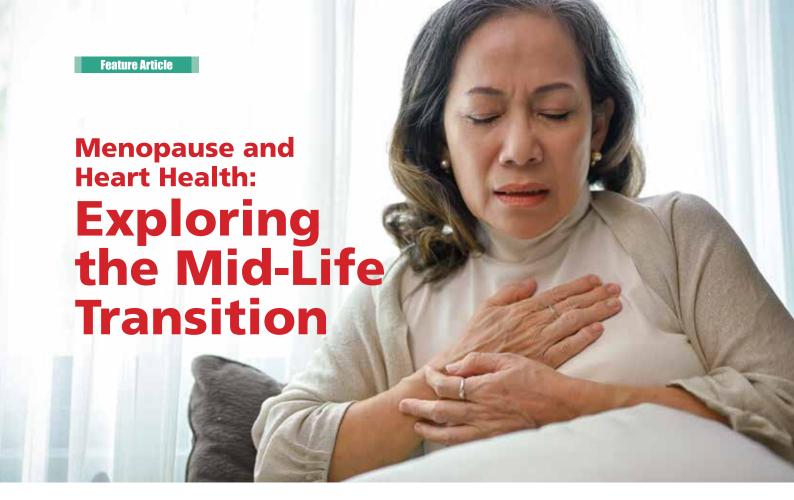
Vitamin D and Atherosclerosis

- Atherosclerosis describes the build-up and formation of a "plaque" (a mass containing cholesterol, fat, blood cells, and other substances) in the artery walls, which creates a blockage of blood flow.
- Inflammation is known to promote the growth of plaques in the artery walls. Studies show that vitamin D may play a role in preventing this inflammation, therefore reducing blockage by the plaque.
- Cholesterol is one of the main components that form the plaque which blocks the arteries. Studies indicate that vitamin D may also reduce the flow of cholesterol in the blood, which may lead to a lower risk of plaque formation.

Simple Tips to Maximise Your Vitamin D Intake

- Spend time under the sun. It is recommended to take part in outdoor activities for at least 10-15 minutes every other day. Individuals with darker skin tones are recommended to spend longer amounts of time under the sun. However, be careful as too much sun exposure without sunscreen can be dangerous.
- 2) **Eat more foods that are high in vitamin D.** Foods like fatty fishes (e.g. salmon, tuna, trout, etc.), mushrooms (e.g. shiitake, maitake, button, etc.), and fortified foods (orange juice, plant-based milks, etc.) are high in dietary vitamin D. Therefore, it is recommended to incorporate these foods into your diet.
- 3) **Consider taking supplements.** The body is able to produce enough vitamin D purely from sun exposure and dietary intake. However, for some individuals, their body's natural ability to produce vitamin D may be impaired (e.g. due to a medical condition, interference with medications, etc.). In such cases, it may be useful to take vitamin D supplementations. Speak with a healthcare professional to learn more about vitamin D supplements and if they are necessary for you.

Vitamin D is not just important for our bone health but may also be important for our cardiovascular health. Ensuring sufficient sun exposure time is one of the simplest ways to ensure the natural production of vitamin D in our bodies. Moreover, it is important to maintain our dietary vitamin D intake. In the end, it is up to us to take control of our heart health. As such, we should all strive to take proactive steps today to ensure better heart health in the future.



Menopause marks a period in a woman's life when her ability to reproduce ends due to the running out of her limited 'egg supply'. It can last between 7 to 14 years, in which during this time, there are various changes in hormones, emotions, and the body. Interestingly, research indicates that women that have gone through menopause might be more prone to developing certain heart conditions compared to those who haven't reached menopause yet. This raises an important question: why does this happen?

The Inside Story: What Menopause Does to The Body

As women gets older, their 'egg supply' steadily decreases. During the beginning of menopause, it is normal for women to experience an increase in menopausal symptoms (Table 1). This can lead to minor disruptions a women's menstrual cycle, resulting in irregular cycles. To compensate for this, a woman's body will naturally increase the production of certain hormones. However, by the time a woman reaches the late stages of menopause, this hormonal compensation is no longer sustainable.

During menopause, a range of effects on the body are usually experienced. While many of these changes are more noticeable, others can go unnoticed. A key shift in menopause involves a significant decrease in oestrogen hormone levels due to the ovaries stopping ovulation and periods completely. Consequently, this can affect different body systems to cause a range of different symptoms (Table 1).

Table 1: Common symptoms of menopause

Common Menopause Symptoms

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Changes in the regularity and flow of the menstrual cycle
- Chills
- Vaginal dryness
- Difficulty in sleeping (insomnia)
- Changes in mood (may lead to depression and/ or anxiety)
- Weight gain and slowed metabolism
- Thinning hair and dry skin

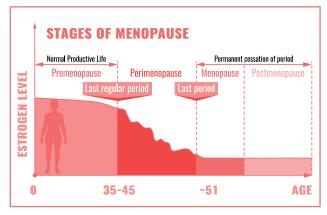


Figure 1: The stages of menopause and relative amount of oestrogen in a woman's body.

Oestrogen and Cardiovascular Diseases: What's the Connection?

Oestrogen, a hormone produced and released by the female reproductive organs (ovaries), plays a vital role in the female physiology, including the development of female sexual traits, breakdown of fats. However, a less frequently known aspect of oestrogen's function is its role in maintaining the health of blood vessels.

With the onset of menopause comes a decline in oestrogen levels, which can potentially impact blood vessel function. This could help explain why women have a higher risk of developing certain cardiovascular diseases after they have gone through menopause.

The decrease in oestrogen is believed to lead to changes in the blood vessel function, increased inflammation, and reduced flexibility of blood vessels to expand and contract. As a result, women who are going through menopause may experience progressive aging of their blood vessels, increased insulin sensitivity, and elevated blood pressure. These combined factors contribute to the increased risk of developing cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) such as coronary hear disease, cerebrovascular disease, rheumatic heart disease, and many more.

Diving deeper into this topic, there are three main reasons that provide an explanation to why post-menopause women have a higher risk of developing CVDs.

- 1) Increased vascular tone. Vascular tone refers to how constricted blood vessels are within the body. Studies show that a decrease in oestrogen levels in women who have gone through menopause can impact the vascular tone of their blood vessels, potentially leading to the narrowing of the blood vessels. Consequently, this may result in a higher risk of developing CVDs.
- **2) Body Mass Index and cholesterol changes.** Following menopause, women are more likely to have an increased body mass index (BMI) and abdominal obesity. This is alarming as, in addition to these changes, women often experience an increase in cholesterol and triglyceride levels post-menopause. As a result, there is a higher risk of fats building up in the artery wall, which subsequently increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes.
- 3) Age-related changes. Menopause often occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. As such, this is a time when age-related changes are common. Studies have shown that various natural metabolic and hormonal changes



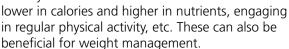
that occur when we are older can directly result in an elevated blood pressure. Therefore, increasing the risk of CVDs.

Protecting Your Heart: Essential Tips for Postmenopausal Women

- Follow healthy dietary patterns. In general, a healthy dietary pattern involves eating meals that are balanced, moderate, and varied. "Balanced" refers to eating different food groups (i.e. protein,
 - carbohydrates, dairy, etc.) in the right proportions. "Moderate" rerefers to eating the right amounts of a certain food group according to your needs. And "Varied" refers to eating a variety of foods from a certain food group (i.e. eating rice, wholemeal bread, or tubers as a source of carbohydrates).



- **Get active.** It is recommended to have 150 to 300 minutes of physical activity throughout the week. This can start with simple exercises like walking around the neighbourhood, taking the stairs at work, etc. By taking each step, you move closer towards a healthier lifestyle.
- Aim for a healthy weight. It is important to set achievable goals and work towards them. This may involve reducing portion sizes, making smart and healthy food choices that are



- Avoid smoking and consuming alcohol. Smoking and alcohol are known to be significant contributors to the development of CVDs. If you are a smoker or a regular drinker of alcohol, it is important to quit. Consult with a healthcare professional to discuss whether medication or other support is necessary for you to successfully quit.
- **Keep stress under control.** Practising stress-reducing techniques such as meditation, deep breathing or yoga can be useful in managing the stressors in your life.



Menopause can be a challenging period to navigate as a woman, especially with the different

hormonal, physiological, and emotional changes that occur. What's concerning is that some of these changes can contribute to risk factors impacting your lipid metabolism and the health of your blood vessels. This, in turn, raises the likelihood of developing cardiovascular diseases. Taking charge of your heart health early on is crucial. By adopting healthy eating habits and staying physically active before or as you enter menopause, you can proactively lower your chances of developing cardiovascular disease later in life.



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- 1. EFSA Journal 2010; 8(12): 1885
- 2. Diets that are of low in GI and high in dietary fiber are protective -WHO Europe Diabetes

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Hajjah Ainon Hj Kuntom

Sentiasa minum air suam dan makan raja buah tempatan untuk menjaga kesihatan jantung

Menurut pakar pakar dietetik kesihatan melalui beberapa kajian mengenai minum air suam tiap tiap hari adalah baik dan segar untuk kesihatan diri.

Apabila bangun daripada tidur setiap pagi minumlah dua gelas air suam sebelum sarapan pagi. laitu semasa perut masih kosong. Cara terapi minum air suam boleh melegakan kesihatan jantung dalam masa sebulan seperti darah tinggi dan sakit jantung yang tidak serious.

Penurunan kolesterol dalam saluran jantung dalam masa empat bulan dan jantung yang tersumbat tetapi tidak beku dalam masa enam bulan. Itu pun kalau terapi minum air panas diamalkan secara harian dengan tekun.

Minum air suam ini juga boleh mengurangkan

kesan dehidrasi dalam badan. Penjelasan di atas adalah mengambil kira sekiranya kita minum air sejuk atau air batu kita boleh menyebabkan saluran jantung tersumbat dengan kolesterol dan ia boleh mengakibatkan serangan jantung secara mendadak. Perlu diingatkan disini suhu badan manusia adalah di antara 36.0 – 37.0 darjah centegrate dan air batu merupakan 0 darjah centegrate, jadi bagaimanakah cara untuk mengimbangi perkara suhu badan ini yang boleh memudahkan menimbul berbagai rasa yang tidak sedap badan atau seimbang. Air sejuk

Dengan demikian kerap kali lah minum air suam supaya ia boleh melembabkan dan mencantikkan kulit badan.

sering mengakibatkan sakit perut.

Kedua kita perlu mengamalkan makan buahbuahan tempatan untuk sarapan pagi selepas minum air suam. Selepas setengah jam minum air suam adalah baik juga untuk kesihatan bagi kita makan buah tempatan.

Paling baik untuk makan adalah buah betik. Betik merupakan sejenis buah raja tempatan (king of fruits) yang telah dinobatkan oleh World Health Organization (WHO). Buah betik mempunyai nutritional value yang paling tinggi misalnya mempunyai ketinggian kalsium 2 kali ganda dari buah epal. Betik mengandungi 13 kali ganda vitamin C apabila dibandingkan dengan buahbuahan yang lain seperti pisang dan tembikai. Selain dari itu betik juga mengandungi 10 kali ganda vitamin A apabila dibandingkan dengan buah kiwi dan 18 kali ganda vitamin A apabila dibandingkan dengan buah nenas.

Amalkan gaya hidup sihat dengan makan buah betik dalam diet harian dan minum air suam secara berkala untuk meningkatkan kesihatan dan mencegah dehidrasi. Penting juga untuk menjaga kesehatan jantung dengan memilih buah-buahan tempatan. Namun, perlu diingatkan bahwa keunikan struktur biologi setiap individu perlu dipertimbangkan, terutama dalam konteks mengatasi masalah penyakit jantung.



Walk A Million Miles for Heart Health



NESTLÉ OMEGA PLUS presents a RM50,000 donation to Yayasan Jantung Malaysia (YJM).

In a resounding success, NESTLÉ OMEGA PLUS has successfully concluded its fourth Walk A Million Miles (WAMM) campaign, which brought together 30,000 Malaysians to collectively walk an incredible 2,091,044 miles in total over the month of September. In honour of World Heart Day on September 29, the campaign, with the theme "Langkah Bersama, Jantung Dijaga" (Steps Together, Hearts Protected), sought to raise awareness of the issue of heart health in Malaysia.

To further support Yayasan Jantung Malaysia (YJM) and Institut Jantung Negara (IJN) Foundation in their efforts to educate and help Malaysians on their heart health journey, Juan Aranols, CEO of Nestlé (Malaysia) Berhad donated a total of RM100,000 for both organisations. Ybhg Tan Sri Dato' Kamaruzzaman bin Shariff, Vice President of YJM, stressed the importance and impact of WAMM in

encouraging healthie lifestyles, addressing the alarming rise in non-communicable diseases in Malaysia, particularly heart disease.

The Chairman of the IJN Foundation, Toh Puan Dato' Seri Hajjah Dr Aishah Ong, thanked Nestlé for their commitment as well as Malaysians for their support and dedication, citing the campaigns ability to increase public awareness of heart health. Preceding World Heart Day, NESTLÉ OMEGA PLUS engage with the public using the BookDoc app platform, where participants logged their miles and fostered friendly competition.

With the final result of 2,091,044 miles walked, the campaign aim was doubled, marking the highest achievement in WAMM's history. In addition to this, the event was well received by the public as articipation increased by over 14% compared to the year before. NESTLÉ OMEGA PLUS remains committed to encouraging Malaysian to have active, healthy lives and underline the importance of every step in creating a country that is heart-healthy.

As we celebrate this monumental achievement, it is important to acknowledge the effect of collective efforts in raising heart health awareness to build a healthier Malaysia – one step at a time.



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It is recommended for middle aged to older adults (aged > 40), individuals aiming to improve blood circulation, individuals with poor blood circulation and individuals who lead a hectic lifestyle.

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