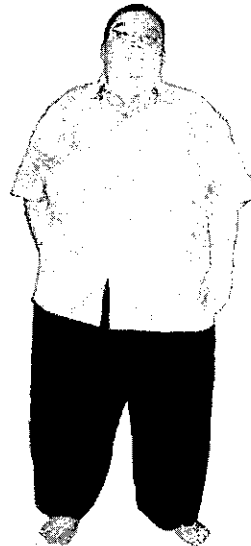


Thailand under *Obesity Crisis*

Parichart Kumcheen*

Eating while talking about her health, Chadarat Itsaramanoros had no sense of regret about her 155 kg body. “I know I am among Thailand’s overweight population, but I don’t care,” said Chadarat. Finally, her parents demanded that she must lose some of her weight before it was too late.

Chadarat whose height is 165 centimeters works at home. She is a freelance writer. She loves to work at night, and sleeps during the day. When she works at night she eats snacks, dessert and drinks soda. Although she knows that she eats unhealthy and at inappropriate times, she said that she can not change her way of life. “I eat everything I think it is very delicious, and makes me satisfied,” said Itsaramanoros.



Chadarat Itsaramanoros

As the lifestyle in Thailand rapidly changes, Thais are confronted with a new kind of plague: obesity. Thailand is among top five Asia-Pacific nations with the highest numbers of obese people, and by 2015 Thailand will have a whopping 21 million members of a “fat tummy network,” according to the Ministry of Public Health.

Despite the widespread availability of nutritional information in schools, doctors’ offices, on the internet and on product packaging, it is evident that overeating and wrong eating habit remains a substantial problem. In the period of 2005-2007, obesity rates in Thailand have increased from 10 million in 2005 to 17 million in 2007, according to the Ministry of Public Health. This figure shows that Thailand which boasts healthy cuisine is battling with the obesity crisis.

In the past, most Thais have wrong beliefs that the overweight or plump person could indicate the high rank or wealth in society as most Thais always call that person “ar-sia” which means wealthy person. However, today the medical circle around the world confirms that obesity is the major cause of almost health problems, according to the Ministry of Public Health.

“The obesity which is a part of Metabolic Syndrome is a quiet murderer that people have never paid attention to,” said Dr. Ratchada Kasamsap, a lecturer in Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University.

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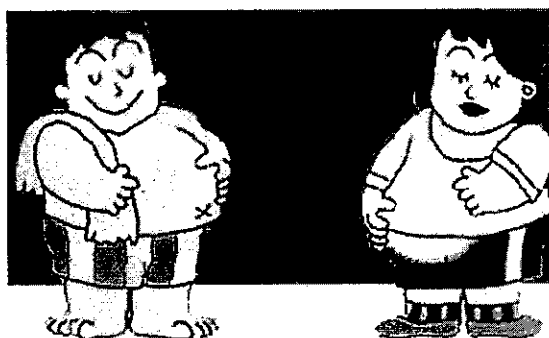
According to the statistics of the Ministry of Public Health on March 6, 2008, it shows that 1.4 million of 17.6 million Thai children are obese because they lack exercise, love sitting and watching television or play computer game all day. Importantly, they love to eat too much snack, soft drinks and fast food which can be prepared and served very quickly.

“We have to campaign all Thais to change their eating habit by reducing sweet, fat and salty food,” said Dr. Narongsak Ankasuwaphala, a director general of the Health Department. Ankasuwaphala said that today Thais had higher risk behavior to be chronic diseases. Thais ate sweet food three times higher from the past, so it caused the obesity, and then diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, etc.

At one restaurant beside the road, there are four fat girls sitting and eating their favorite food. One of them yelled, “Khao Ka Moo! Lots of slab of fat!” Ka Moo is a huge slab of pork meat and fat, steaming on a pan. A very juicy fat, half a boiled egg, dark green cabbage and sweet gravy are topped on white rice. That is called “Khao Ka Moo” in Thailand. “This is my favorite dish.” “I have never missed to order it,” said Phanid Matangkarat, the Khao Ka Moo customer or lover.

In April, 2008 the Ministry of Public Health reveals its survey which is 825 people of 35 years old in 8 provinces- Lampang, Phayao, Ubon Ratchathani, Chaiyaphum, Pathumthani, Chumphon, and Trang Provinces that 53 % of people are obese. Those people also have high risk of high blood pressure although they get enough information about it. 70% of those people still do not control their weight, and 90% of those people love to eat deep-fried food, food which has coconut cream as ingredient, and highly sugared food. 76-86% of those people love to eat rice with fat pig’s leg (Khao Ka Moo), and they do not taste their food before adding some sugar.

“As usual we should eat sugar only *8 teaspoons per day, but we eat more,*” said Sanga Damapong, a vice-president of a Nutrition Association of Thailand.

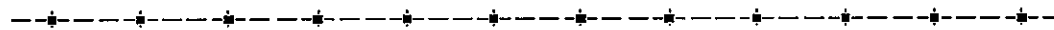


“The more your waistline increase, the quicker you die,” according to the Ministry of Public Health

The survey shows that 46% of Thai women have over-standard waistline that is more than 80 centimeters, and 15% of Thai men have over-standard waistline that is more than 90 centimeters. The causes of the obesity of those people are uncared-for eating habit and no exercise, according to the Ministry of Public Health.

Dr. Narongsak Ankasuwaphala said that Thais should make themselves lack of stress because the stress is also one reason that makes the workers eat more sweet food or eat inappropriate time. Every 5 centimeters increase will add higher risk to be chronic diseases 4-5 times.

According to the Ministry of Public Health, more than 38 million Thais do not exercise, so it causes the obesity or overweight. In 2011 the Ministry of Public Health has planed to promote exercise policy around the country for good health of Thais. The government plans to support all villages to establish exercising club in their communities in order to decrease the villagers' illness.



Most Thais today still spoil themselves with eating as their favor by not considering the suitable amounts of food and they also love cooking or flavoring their food by not considering the danger that comes from their favor, according to the Ministry of Public Health.

Prof. Dr. Raiwadee Jongsuwat, a lecturer in Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University said that today Thais have meals outside their home, so they can not control the materials or ingredients of food like vegetable, meat, and oil. Thais should cook food by themselves, and turn back to eat more vegetable and fruit.

“Changing eating behavior by considering suitable kinds, quantity, time, and exercise is the best solution to control your weight,” said Sanya Kongsomboonwet, a nutrition expert.

Ms. Kongsomboonwet said that selecting the oil that has low saturated fat and high monounsaturated fat such as an olive oil, canola oil, and palm oil will reduce cholesterol and triglyceride levels.



“Boiled vegetable and shrimp paste and chili sauce, a famous Thai dish is Thai healthy food which has low fat that we should promote Thais to eat,” said Dr. Vallop Phonreungwong.

Dr. Vallop Phonreungwong said that although Thailand has several healthy cuisines, it still has an increasing obese people. Thai people should have healthy meal in suitable



quantity and proper time, especially avoiding sweet and fat food. They should eat food that is high in dietary fiber such as vegetable and fruit.

Mr. Phonreungwong said that another solution for the obese was the exercise which should be enough and consistent. Thais should avoid sitting for a long time such as watching television and using the computer. Importantly, they should change their attitude that is fat people mean the wealthy.

Mr. Phonreungwong also said that as obese Thais were increasing every year, it would cause lots of problems to their families, society and country which had to spend lots of money to take care of the other Thais' health and to make a campaign to help Thais lose weight.

Mr. Yingsak Jraipinit, food researcher from Pilot Plant Development and Training Institute of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (Bangkuntien) said that there is much healthy Thai food such as a sour relish with sliced papaya (Somtam) ;however, most Thais still love to eat very fat and oily food like Khao Ka Moo or fried banana (Kluai Thod), so it damages their health.

"Thais also love to eat fast food which is an unhealthy food," said Mr. Jraipinit. He also said that he ever brought a 140 g piece of pizza to test the calories. He got 38.6% of carbohydrate, 39% of fat, and 22.4% of protein while the calories per day that everyone wants are only 55-65% of carbohydrate, 25-30% of fat, and 10-15% of protein. If we eat more than one piece, there will be more unwanted calories.

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The Royal College of Physician of Thailand, the Ministry of Public Health, Nutrition Association of Thailand, Thai Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, and the Office of Thai Health Promotion Foundation assemble to establish Thai Raipoong Network which is the project for controlling and reducing the overweight problem of Thais. The campaign raises public awareness of obesity and related health outcomes. The direction and measurement for promoting obesity control focus on academic background and scientific data as well as modernization, effectiveness, and worthiness, according to Prof. Dr. Wannee Nitiyanant, the chairperson of Thai Raipoong Network.

"The number of the obese people in Thailand is very high, so we have to establish Raipoong Network to solve this problem," said Prof. Dr. Wannee Nitiyanant.

Ms. Ratchavi Sophonnacheaud, a project coordinator of Thai Raipoong Network also said that Thai government has launched many projects to campaign Thais to reduce their weight or to take care of themselves such as Thai Police without Fat Tummy in the future by selecting 50 police to have a training course and then change their eating habit and pay attention to their exercises. The police who can lose their weight will receive the certificate in order to promote Thais to pay attention to their health. Thus, the aim of this project is to enhance Thai police have good health or to make them pay attention to their habit or health.

The chairperson of Thai Raipoong Network also said at her last suggestion that permanently adapting and changing the living behavior can be achieved by implementing 3E-the eating habit, exercise and emotion control. Thai Raipoong Network is very confident that all Thais following the 3E will be absolutely successful in their health. This fact shows that Thai government is trying to solve the obesity crisis before it is too late.

Source lists., Books, Websites

- Interviewing Prof. Dr. Wannee Nithiyanon, the chairperson of Thai Raipoong Network
- Interviewing Chadarat Itsaramanoros, an obese woman to show her thought and lifestyle
- Interviewing Mr. Yingsak Jraipinit, food researcher from Pilot Plant Development and Training Institute of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (Bangkuntien)
- Interviewing Dr. Vallop Phonreungwong
- Interviewing Sanya Kongsomboonwet, a nutrition expert.
- Interviewing Prof. Dr. Raiwadee Jongsuwat, a lecturer in Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University
- Interviewing Ms. Ratchavi Sophonnacheaud, a project coordinator of Thai Raipoong Network
- Interviewing Dr. Narongsak Ankasuwaphala
- Interviewing Dr. Ratchada Kasamsap, a lecturer in Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University.
- Gathering the information from the Ministry of Public Health:
<http://www.moph.go.th>
- Gathering the information from many books and articles
- Searching news about obesity or overweight people in several newspapers