

Key Message 1



Eat a variety of foods within your recommended intake



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1. Terminology

Adequate diet

An adequate diet provides enough energy, nutrients and fibre to maintain an individual's health. A diet that is adequate for one individual may not be adequate for another.

Balanced diet

A balanced diet is a diet that contains the combination of foods that provide the proper balance of nutrients. The body needs many types of foods in varying amounts to maintain health. The right balance of nutrients needed to maintain health can be achieved by eating the proper balance of all healthy foods including fruits, vegetables and meats.

Food group

A food group puts together foods of similar nutrient content and function. There are five food groups. These food groups contain foods that are similar in calories, carbohydrate, protein and fat content.

Healthy diet

A healthy diet is a diet which provides the proper combination of energy and nutrients. Four characteristics explain a healthful diet adequate, balanced, moderate and varied.

Malaysian Food Pyramid

A food pyramid is a visual tool that is used as a guide in designing a healthy diet. It is developed as a guide to provide a framework for the types and amounts of food that can be eaten in combination to provide a healthy diet. A food pyramid consists of levels that represent various food groups. Indicated beside each food group is the recommended number of servings per day from each group. From the bottom to the top of the food pyramid, the size of each food group becomes smaller indicating that an individual should eat more of the foods at the base of the pyramid and less of the foods at the top of the pyramid.

Moderation

Moderation is key to a healthy diet. Moderation refers to eating the right amounts of foods to maintain a healthy weight and to optimise the body's metabolic process.

Recommended nutrient intake (RNI)

Recommended nutrient intake is the daily intake which meets the nutrient requirements of almost all (97%) apparently healthy individuals, in an age and sex-specific population group. The range of intakes encompassed by the RNI and the upper tolerable nutrient intake should be considered

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sufficient to prevent deficiency, maintain optimal health while avoiding toxicity (NCCFN, 2005).

Serving size

In the dietary guideline, serving size is the recommended amount of foods consumed daily in household measures used for foods and drinks, for example cup, plate, bowl, tablespoon and teaspoon.

A serving size defined in the Malaysian Food Pyramid may not equal to a serving size defined in a food label.

Variety

Variety refers to eating many different types of foods each day and to ensure better selection of healthier foods. By selecting a variety of foods, the chances of consuming the multitude of nutrients the body needs are optimised.

2. Introduction

A healthy diet is important to supply nutrients, reduce risk of diseases and to manage certain diseases. Healthy and balanced eating habits provide energy and nutrients required by the body. The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines 1999, (MDG 1999) (NCCFN, 1999) suggested three important considerations when planning healthy meals, specifically, (i) eating a balanced diet (ii) consume a wide variety of foods and (iii) consume foods in moderation (NCCFN, 1999). These recommendations have also been suggested by other Dietary Guidelines from various countries such as

USA (USDHHS & USDA, 2005), Australia (NHMRC, 2003) and Singapore (HPB, 2003).

It is very important that an individual ensures getting appropriate foods and incorporates the principle of good nutrition such as variety, a balanced intake of nutrients and moderation. Different foods provide different combinations of energy and nutrients. The best way to meet the daily requirements is to eat a varied diet that combines cereals, fruits and vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, legumes and dairy products.

Water is also important as it is essential for many body functions, for example regulating the body temperature and digestion. A healthy diet ensures that nutrient deficiencies and excesses can be prevented. The Malaysian Food Pyramid acts as a guide to provide a framework for the types and amounts of food that can be eaten in combination to provide a healthy diet. The levels that represent various food groups such as from the bottom to the top of the food pyramid indicates that an individual should eat more of the foods at the base of the pyramid and less of the foods at the top of the pyramid.

The Malaysian Adult Nutrition Survey 2003 (MANS 2003) reported that generally adult Malaysians fulfilled some recommendations of the MDG 1999, particularly meeting the suggested intake for the cereal group, fruits and vegetable group and meat group. However, two food groups were of concern. Despite meeting the recommendation for the meat group, the consumption was excessive, which was up to nine servings a day. The milk group consumption was only 0.14 serving a day which was well below the recommended intake. (Norimah *et al.*, 2008a). The MDG is revised and updated taking into consideration the recent evidence on these changes in

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food consumption pattern and dietary habits of Malaysians as well as nutritional and health related problems in Malaysia.

3. Scientific basis

3.1 Food groups

The three essential macronutrients such as protein, carbohydrate and fat provide energy (calories) to the body. Vitamins and minerals are micronutrients which are important in assuring the proper functioning of the body and in promoting wound healing. In addition to the essential nutrients, foods also contain non-nutrients that can affect the body. These include fibre and phytochemicals (found in plants), many of which are protective against diseases. Some of these compounds act as antioxidants, which protect the body's cells from being damaged.

In the MDG, the different food groups are placed in the four levels of the pyramid (Figure 1.1). The basis of this recommendation is based on the daily caloric needs of the individuals. The distribution of the daily caloric intake consists of percentages of carbohydrates, proteins and fats. The Institute of Medicine recommends 45% to 65% of total calories from carbohydrate, which is equivalent to 130 g carbohydrates per day for adults (IOM, 2005). The WHO Technical Report Series 916, an international dietary guideline, suggests 55% to 75% of total calories from carbohydrate (WHO, 2003). The Malaysian RNI recommends that total carbohydrate should contribute 55% to 70%, total fat 20% to 30% and protein 10% to 15% of total caloric intake per day for adults (NCCFN, 2005). Thus carbohydrate should form the bulk of the caloric needs and therefore should

be eaten the most and placed at the base of the pyramid.

Rice is the staple food of Malaysia. Thus it is imperative that in the MDG, starchy foods form the basis of most meals. The guideline should advise that in planning of meals, starchy foods or cereals should be the main foods while the rest of the meal is planned around foods. The principal nutritional objective is to promote an increased intake of carbohydrate rich foods for those who have low intakes and to maintain optimal intakes among those currently eating high carbohydrate diets.

The basis for most meals should be to include unrefined or minimally processed cereals and grains (whole grain or wholemeal), where possible and to choose fortified cereals and grains when available. WHO has recommended that to prevent coronary heart disease (CHD) and hypertension, an individual should try to consume 30 g of dietary fibre per day. (WHO, 2003).

Unprocessed cereals (grains) and legumes and other foods that are natural sources of dietary fibre should contribute to an average intake of at least 25 g per day (WCRF/AICR, 2007). The limited studies of fibre intake in the Klang Valley reported that the mean intake among men and women in Kuala Lumpur was 13.2 g per day (Suzana, Azhar & Fatimah, 2004) while only 7.5 g per day among diabetics in Kuala Lumpur (Hanapi, 2008). The WCRF/AICR (2007) reported that 10 g of total dietary fibre can be achieved by consuming six servings of complex carbohydrates, two servings of legumes, five servings of vegetables and three servings of fruits.

They also suggested that the population should consume at least 600 g

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daily of non-starchy vegetables and fruits. Therefore, it is very important that in the revised dietary guideline, the suggested servings for cereal group should include recommendations for unprocessed cereals (grains) and legumes. Increasing the serving size for fruits and vegetables group will also increase fibre intake.

Fruits and vegetables are placed at the second level of the pyramid. Fruits and vegetables, which are generally low in energy density and when consumed in varieties, are sources of many vitamins, minerals and other bioactive compounds such as phytochemicals. Thus fruits and vegetables can help to prevent and lower the risk for certain diseases. For example, eating more fruits and vegetables can help to lower blood pressure and may lower the risk of some cancers (WCRF/ AICR, 2007).

Studies have shown that high intake of fruits and vegetables may have a protective effect against cardiovascular disease (Liu *et al.*, 2000) and diabetes (Fung *et al.*, 2002). The WHO Technical Report Series 916 recommends intake of 400 g to 500 g fresh fruits and vegetables a day to reduce risk of coronary heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure (WHO, 2003).

Foods such as fish, meat and poultry as well as legumes and nuts provide nutrients which are vital for health as well as the maintenance of the body. Milk and milk products is also placed in the same level as they provide rich sources of protein, riboflavin and calcium. These foods which are rich in protein should contribute 10% to 15% of total caloric intake per day and are placed at the third level of the pyramid. Considering the nutritional value of these food groups, it is important to include these foods in the daily diet. Insufficient or excessive intake of these foods should be

avoided as both situations have significant implications on individual health. Excessive intake could increase the risk of hypercholesterolaemia and coronary heart disease while insufficient intake could lead to protein deficiency and anaemia (WHO, 2003). Thus taking into consideration these various implications, it is recommended that this food group is consumed in moderate amounts.

3.2 Serving size

The recommended number of servings is an average amount that individuals should choose to eat each day. The number of serving calculated for the dietary guideline is based on 60% carbohydrate, of which 50% is complex carbohydrate and 10% refined sugar, 15% protein and 25% fat (NCCFN, 2005). The recommended number of servings are different for individuals at different life stages and genders.

When the total calorie intake has been calculated according to percentage of carbohydrate, protein and fat, the total calories will then be converted to exchange list for carbohydrate, protein and fat. This is then converted to serving size. The number of servings for the macronutrient intake are calculated based on 1500 kcal, 2000 kcal and 2500 kcal per day.

In the newly proposed Malaysian Food Pyramid, there are five food groups placed at four levels. At the base of the food pyramid is the cereals, tubers and grains group. The number of servings recommended for this group is four to eight servings per day, depending on the caloric requirements per day. One serving of food in this group contains 30 g of carbohydrate, while in the previous dietary guideline (NCCFN, 1999) one serving of food contains 15 g carbohydrate. The

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recommended change in the serving size of the cereals and grains group is based on the results of a survey which determined the understanding of the proposed messages in the dietary guideline (IHBR, 2009). The results indicated that the population's habitual intake of this food group, for example rice which is the staple food, is more appropriate when a serving contains 30 g of carbohydrate. The MANS survey 2003 also showed that 97% of Malaysian consumed rice daily (Norimah *et al.*, 2008b).

4. Current status

Food intake studies in Malaysia had been carried out since the 1980's (Chong *et al.*, 1984; Norimah & Mohd Riza, 1999; Foo *et al.*, 2006). An earlier study on adults in poverty kampungs demonstrated mean of 1874 kcal based on household consumption estimates (Chong *et al.*, 1984). Among university students in Bangi, who were young adults, Norimah & Mohd Riza (1999) showed that female students were consuming 1686 kcal per day in contrast to 2159 kcal per day among male students. A more recent study among adolescent boys and girls in Sabah reported mean energy intake between 1468 to 1709 kcal per day (Foo *et al.*, 2006). The two latter studies used three days food record to evaluate food intake. A nationwide survey in 2003, the Malaysian Adults Nutrition Survey, reported that the median energy intake among adult Malaysians was 1540 kcal per day using the 24 hour recall method (Miralini *et al.*, 2008). Energy intake among the rural adults was slightly higher than their urban counterparts. In most economic and socio demographic groups, women had lower median energy intake than men. Although the MANS findings provided the first national estimates of energy intake as well as nutrient intake in the adult Malaysian population, there must be caution in interpreting the

results as nearly half of the population studied under-reported their energy intake (Miralini *et al.*, 2008).

The habitual food intake on the other hand showed that 97% of the population consumed rice twice daily and on average 2 ½ plates per day. Other foods eaten daily were marine fish, green leafy vegetables and sweetened condensed milk. About 90% adults drank at least six glasses of water daily. The habitual average daily intake of foods met the recommendations for the cereal group, fruits and vegetables and meat group. While the consumption of meat group more than fulfilled the recommendation, generally milk consumption was much below the recommended intake (Table 1.1). Adults tend to consume condensed milk which was added to beverages such as *teh tarik*, coffee and chocolate flavoured beverages (Norimah *et al.*, 2008a).

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Table 1.1. A comparison between the recommended servings to be taken per day and actual servings consumed by the Malaysian adult

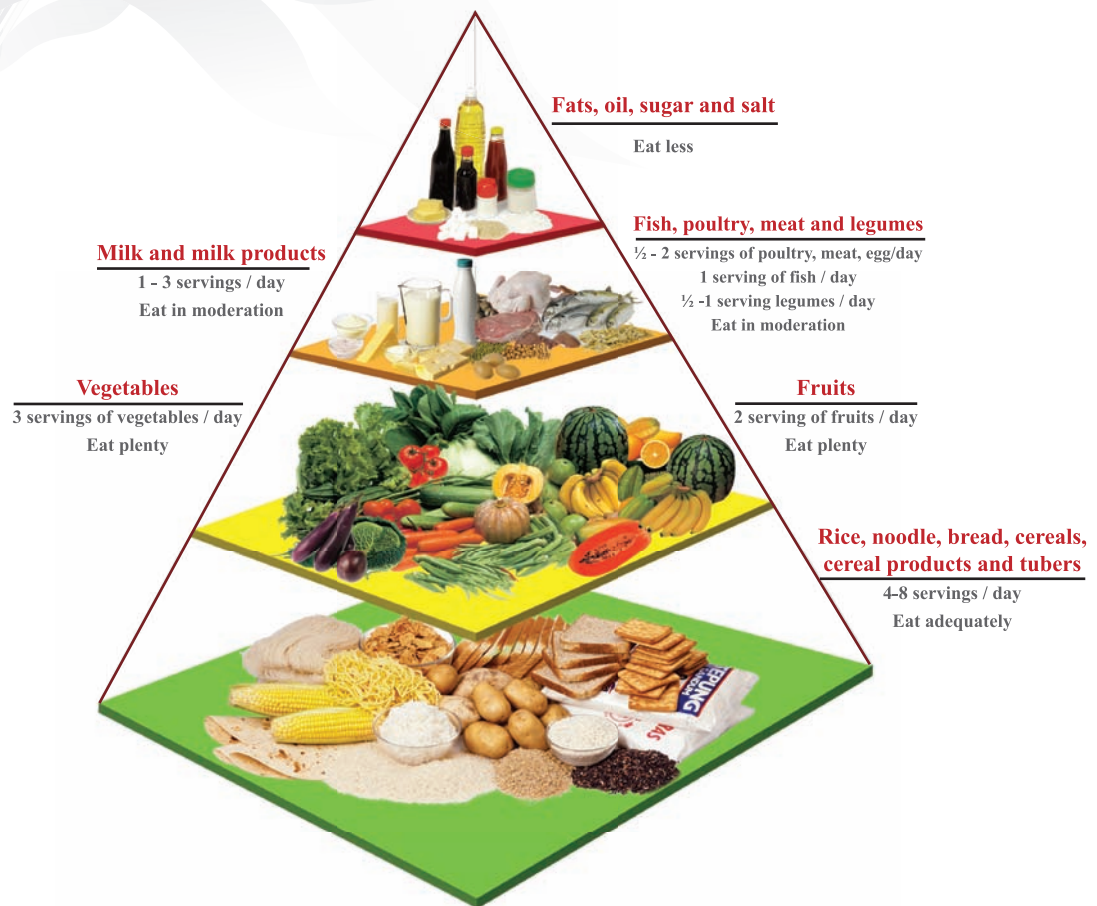
<i>Food group</i>	<i>Malaysian Food Pyramid recommendation</i>	<i>No. of servings consumed per day</i>	<i>Meet Food Pyramid recommendation?</i>
Cereal, cereal products and tubers	8 to 12*	9.91	Yes
Fruits and vegetables	5	6.34	Yes
Meat, poultry, fish, legumes and products	2 to 3	8.74	Excess
Milk and dairy products	1 to 2	0.14	No

* Based on 15g carbohydrate/ serving

Source: Norimah *et al.*, (2008a)

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Malaysian Food Pyramid



Daily serving size
(1500 to 2500 kcal/day)

Figure 1.1 Malaysian Food Pyramid

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5. Key recommendations

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Choose your daily food intake from a combination of foods based on the Malaysian Food Pyramid.

How to achieve

1. To ensure our body gets all the nutrients needed, choose foods from the five food groups based on the Malaysian Food Pyramid.
2. Vary food choices within each food group in your meals.
3. Choose healthier cooking preparation methods such as steaming, grilling, baking, boiling and reduce frying and adding *santan* to the dishes.

Key recommendation 2

Choose your daily food intake according to the serving size recommended.

How to achieve

1. Choose the number of servings recommended based on your calorie needs as shown in Table 1.2. The following guide will help you to determine the number of servings that you should eat daily to maintain your body weight. This is based on gender, physical activity and weight status.
 - a. For sedentary women and an older adult, the recommended calorie intake is 1500 kcal.



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- b. For most children, teenage girls, moderately active women and sedentary men, the recommendations for calorie intake is 2000 kcal per day. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding may need more.
- c. For teenage boys, active men, very active women as well as underweight men and women, the recommendations for calorie intake can be more than 2500 kcal per day.
- d. A tip to remember the more physically active you are, the more calories are required per day. However, if you are very sedentary, less calories are needed per day.

Table 1.2 . Distribution of number of servings according to food groups based on calorie value

Food group	1500 kcal/day	2000 kcal/day	2500 kcal/day
Cereals and grains	4 servings ¹	6 servings ¹	8 servings ¹
Fruits	2 servings	2 servings	2 servings
Vegetables	3 servings	3 servings	3 servings
Meat/poultry	½ serving ²	1 serving ²	2 servings ²
Fish	1 serving ²	1 serving ²	1 serving ²
Legumes	½ serving ³	1 serving ³	1 serving ³
Milk and dairy products	1 serving ³	2 serving ³	3 serving ³

¹ Based on 30 g carbohydrate per serving

² Based on 14 g protein per serving

³ Based on 7 g protein per serving

Fat and sugars calorie values have been incorporated into the total calorie intake per day

Example of one day menu for 1500 kcal, 2000 kcal and 2500 kcal is shown in Appendix 1

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2. Vary the food choices in the same group as they are interchangeable. The foods and their serving sizes below have similar nutrient content.

***One serving of cereals, cereal products and tubers
(30 g carbohydrate per serving)***

<i>Bihun</i> , soaked	1 ½ cups
Biscuits, cream crackers	6 pieces
Bread, white	2 slices
Bread, wholemeal	2 slices
<i>Laksa</i> , soaked	1 ½ cups
<i>Mi / kuey teow</i> , wet	1 cup
Potato	2 whole
<i>Putu mayang (Putu mayam)</i>	2 pieces
Rice, white, cooked	2 <i>senduk</i> / 1 cup
Rice porridge, plain	2 cups
Sweet potato / yam / tapioca	1 cup

***One serving of fruit
(15 g carbohydrate per serving)***

Apple / chinese pear / mango / <i>ciku</i>	1 whole
Banana, berangan (medium size)	1 whole
Banana, emas	2 whole
Durian	3 <i>ulas</i>
Grapes	8 small
Guava/ pear	½ whole
Mandarin orange (small to medium)	1 whole
Papaya / pineapple / watermelon	1 slice
Prunes	4 small
Raisins	1 dessert spoon

*Refer to Key Message 5, *Appendix 1*, for serving size and weight of fruits and vegetables

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One serving of vegetables

Dark green leafy vegetables with edible stem, cooked	½ cup
Fruit vegetables, cooked	½ cup
<i>Ulam</i> , raw	1 cup

One serving of fish, poultry, meat and egg (14 g protein per serving)

Anchovies (head removed)	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup
Beef, lean (7.5 cm x 9 cm x 0.5 cm)	2 pieces
Chicken , drumstick	1 piece
Cockles without shells	1 cup
Eggs, chicken	2 whole
<i>Ikan kembung</i>	1 medium
<i>Ikan selar</i>	1 medium
<i>Ikan tenggiri</i> (14 cm x 8 cm x 1 cm)	1 piece
Chicken liver	2 pieces
<i>Telur puyuh</i>	12 whole
Squid	2 medium

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One serving of legumes (7 g protein per serving)

Chickpea / dhal	1 cup
Green / mung bean / canned baked bean	1½ cups
Tempe / <i>taukua</i> / <i>tauhu</i>	2 pieces
Unsweetened soya bean milk	1½ glasses

One serving of milk and dairy products (7 g protein per serving)

Cheese	1 slice
Milk, low fat	1 glass
Milk, evaporated	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup
Milk, powdered (heaped)	4 dessert spoons
Yoghurt	1 cup

Standard measurements used in this dietary guideline are as follows:

1 cup	=	200 ml.
1 glass	=	250 ml.
1 table spoon (tbs)	=	15 ml.
1 dessert spoon (dsp)	=	10 ml.
1 tea spoon (tsp)	=	5 ml.

Source: Suzana *et al.*, (2002)

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Additional recommendations : Nutrient supplements

Eating a variety of foods daily as guided by the Malaysian Food Pyramid should provide all the nutrients needed by the body. Therefore, supplements are not necessary for most individuals. Supplements of vitamins, minerals or fibre do not supply the nutrients and other essential components present in foods that are important to health. Nutrient supplements cannot be used as a substitute for proper food choices and supplements of some nutrients taken regularly in large amounts are harmful. However supplements may be needed to meet specific nutrient requirements such as during convalescence, in pregnant and lactating women and for the elderly. Nutrient supplements should only be taken on the advice of nutritionists, dietitians or medical doctors.

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Appendix 1. Example of one day menu for 1500 kcal, 2000 kcal and 2500 kcal

	1500 kcal	2000 kcal	2500 kcal
BREAKFAST	Fried rice (1 cup) cooked with carrot (¼ cup) and french beans (¼ cup) Coffee (1 cup) with low fat milk (¼ cup)	Fried rice (1½ cups) cooked with carrot (¼ cup) and french beans (¼ cup) + soya bean curd (½ piece) + chicken (½ drumstick) Coffee (1 cup) with low fat milk (¼ cup)	Fried rice (1½ cups) cooked with carrot (¼ cup) and french beans (¼ cup) + soya bean curd (½ piece) + chicken (½ drumstick) + fried egg (1 whole) Coffee (1 cup) with low fat milk (¼ cup)
MORNING TEA	Tea without sugar (1 cup)	<i>Apam kukus</i> (4 small round) Tea (1 cup) with low fat milk (¼ cup)	Doughnut (1 piece) <i>Pisang emas</i> (2 whole) Tea (1 cup) with low fat milk (¼ cup)
LUNCH	<i>Bihun sup</i> (1 cup) cooked with small prawn (10 pieces) + <i>sawi</i> + tomato + carrot + baby corn (1 cup) Watermelon (1 slice) Ice lemon tea (with 1 teaspoon sugar) (1 glass)	<i>Bihun sup</i> (1½ cup) cooked with small prawn (10 pieces) + <i>sawi</i> + tomato + carrot + baby corn (1 cup) Papaya (1 slice) Ice lemon tea (with 1 teaspoon sugar) (1 glass)	<i>Bihun sup</i> (1½ cup) cooked with small prawn (10 pieces) + <i>sawi</i> + tomato + carrot + baby corn (1 cup) Mango (1 whole small) Ice lemon tea (with 1 teaspoon sugar) (1 glass) Ice cream cup (1 small)
AFTERNOON TEA	<i>Popia basah</i> (2 pieces) Tea without sugar (1 cup) with low fat milk (¼ cup)	<i>Popia basah</i> (3 pieces) Low fat chocolate drink (1 glass)	<i>Rojak pasembor</i> (1½ cup) consists of soyabean curd + bean sprout + potato + cucumber + turnip + <i>kuah kacang</i> (¼ cup) Low fat chocolate drink (1 glass)
DINNER	White rice (1 cup) <i>Sup sayur campur</i> (½ cup) <i>Ikan kembung bakar berlada</i> (1 medium) <i>Pisang emas</i> (2 whole) Plain water (1 glass)	White rice (1½ cup) <i>Sayur campur</i> (½ cup) <i>Ikan kembung goreng berlada</i> (1 medium) Red apple (1 whole) Plain water (1 glass)	White rice (2 cups) <i>Sayur campur</i> (½ cup) <i>Ikan kembung goreng berlada</i> (1 medium) Guava (½ whole) Plain water (1 glass)