

Boba danger

Bubble teas are a food fad that may prove to be dangerous to our health, due to their high sugar content.

BUBBLE tea has been in the news lately, not only for the long queues of patient customers lining up for a cup of their favourite brew, but also because of the high sugar content found in these beverages.

Consultant physician Dr Tan Wee Yong and dietitian Kong Woan Fei share their thoughts on this latest food craze.

Question: Can bubble tea make you gain weight?

Dr Tan: I would say, yes.

The main culprit is the sugar contained in the drink.

On average, a cup of bubble tea contains 20 teaspoons of sugar.

For a normal healthy adult, it is recommended to take no more than eight teaspoons of sugar a day.

Kong: Bubble tea can definitely make you gain weight as it adds on to your daily calorie intake.

One cup of bubble tea can contain at least 370 calories. The boba alone is 150 calories.

Q: Can it cause diabetes?

Kong: Drinking bubble tea will not cause diabetes directly.

However, its sugar content can pose a high risk of not only diabetes, but also low immunity, accelerated ageing and tooth decay.

Q: Is less sugar or no sugar bubble tea better for health?

Dr Tan: If you request for less sugar, it will reduce the harm, but not necessarily make it harm-free.

We have to remember that in our daily intake, we also consume other products that contain lots of hidden sugar.

Kong: When you hear "brown sugar" and "fresh milk", you probably think that these are healthier ingredients, but you must ask your-

self, how much brown sugar is used?

And what about the other ingredients, specifically the boba?

Of course, requesting for less sugar or no sugar is better, but you still cannot categorise this as a harmless drink in view of the other ingredients.

Q: Does bubble tea have any nutritional value at all?

Kong: We term sugar as an "empty calorie" food.

This means that it only contains calories, but has no other nutritional value.

There is no nutritional value from drinking a high-sugar beverage.

I don't encourage consuming milk from bubble tea either, because milk with sugar is not the same as pure milk.

Q: Is it acceptable for young children or the elderly to drink bubble teas?

Dr Tan: I do not think bubble teas are suitable for young children and the elderly.

Bubble teas contain certain colourings and food additives.

This can cause children to become hyperactive.

For the elderly, their digestive system is slower and less active, so food additives can cause indigestion.

The tapioca balls or boba or pearls in the bubble teas are hard to digest for elderly people.

Kong: Did you know that one cup of brown sugar bubble tea contains three times more sugar than a can of soft drink?

We're talking about 20 teaspoonfuls of sugar in one cup of bubble tea.

A child's sugar intake should not



While the brown sugar and fresh milk marketed in some bubble teas might sound like healthy ingredients, the excessive amount of sugar used makes it anything but healthy. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

be more than five teaspoonfuls a day.

They should not be offered high-sugar beverages as this poses a risk of childhood obesity.

Sugar will make them full and stop them from taking nutritious food that is essential for their development.

Bubble teas are also not suitable for the elderly, especially those with a background of chronic diseases.

Besides, when you age, your metabolism slows down.

Sugar slows down your metabolism even more, making you feel tired and sluggish.

Q: In your opinion, do you think the bubble tea craze will blow over quickly or is it here to stay?

Dr Tan: I think this bubble tea

craze is a fad.

Even its packaging is designed like a cool fashion accessory that can make Instagram-worthy pictures.

Obviously, the main targets are the "hip and cool" youngsters.

As we are in a fast-moving digital age, attention for this kind of product depletes very fast.

Who knows, by next year, there might be another new product craze sweeping over the country.

Kong: In my opinion, it will blow over quickly due to its price and almost similar taste among the different brands.

I tried one recently just to know why people are crazy about it.

And it is basically just fresh milk plus brown sugar plus brown sugar pearls. That's it.

Having said that, I must add that we are only human so we do have

favourites when it comes to certain food or drinks; but as much as you like them, overdosing on them can only bring harm.

The lesson here is to take everything in moderation, bubble tea included!

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