

Chicken brown rice, anyone? Hawkers at Tekka Market join initiative to get Singaporeans to eat healthy



The hawker centre in Little India is the latest to join 12 others around Singapore to offer healthier options, including whole grain dishes. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

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SINGAPORE - Since September, more than 80 hawker stalls at Tekka Market have been serving a variety of healthier food and drinks.

They include 31 stalls offering such dishes as wholemeal prata and chicken brown rice, and all 25 drink stalls, which sell drinks with the Healthier Choice Symbol.

The hawker centre in Little India is the latest to join 12 others around Singapore to offer healthier options, including whole grain dishes.

The initiative is part of the Health Promotion Board's (HPB) efforts to increase healthier food and drinks options at hawker centres and encourage Singaporeans to eat healthily when they are out.

The HPB aims to reach out to 20 hawker centres to offer whole grain dishes by March next year. All 114 hawker centres in Singapore currently already offer lower calorie dishes like fishball noodles, mee soto and yong tau foo in their menu.

Starting early September, the HPB worked with hawkers at Tekka Market, giving them samples of healthier ingredients like brown rice and whole grain bee hoon to test and use in their regular dishes and helping them ensure the taste and texture of their food do not change.

It also helped to connect one of the drink stalls with local manufacturer Faesol, a partner on an HPB scheme that encourages manufacturers to create healthier food and drinks.

Maya Mohan Hot & Cold Drinks stall now sells beverages like water chestnut and iced lemon tea that contain about half the amount of sugar typically found in other similar syrup-based drinks.

It is up to the hawkers to continue serving whole grain options and to source for their own suppliers after the two-month trial period, or continue working with suppliers the HPB has connected them with.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of a food sampling session at Tekka Market on Saturday (Oct 27), Mr Amrin Amin, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health, said the hawkers have given useful feedback.

"They have told us that for certain types of food (such as mee goreng), these taste better with whole grain... and they actually report brisk sales and that's a good development," he said. "But certain other types of food, I think, require a bit of getting used to."

He added: "As more and more people embrace healthy lifestyles, there is increased demand for whole grain options, healthier food, and this in the end reduces prices, and that's the development that we would like to create and to encourage."



Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health Amrin Amin tasting some of the healthier options at Tekka Market with the Health Promotion Board's appointed nutritionist Rosemary Tang. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Madam Hathija Mohaidin Pichai, who owns a Malay food stall at Tekka Market, started to mix brown rice with white rice in her nasi goreng dish.

"We didn't want our regular customers to think the food tastes different so we mixed the rice. The brown rice is just like an additional ingredient," said the 52-year-old. "We told our customers to give it a try, and they liked it."

Madam Hathija, whose husband was hospitalised two years ago for high cholesterol, also said that her family has been watching their diet. They have started mixing brown rice into their dishes, on top of cutting down on salt in their cooking and consuming drinks with less sugar.

"It's important to be healthy and we hope more people will come forward to try the brown rice or whole grain beehoon. I don't mind giving free samples to taste," she added.

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