

## Eating local the healthy way

Chef Wan goes organic and shows that eating healthy can still be delicious.

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Photos by ONG SOON HIN

THE last few years have been pretty hectic for Datuk Redzuawan Ismail, better known as Chef Wan. He travelled the world promoting his work, spearheaded new projects at home and crafted ideas for his upcoming television show.

But that is not all. Chef Wan also did something else during that busy period – he put on a lot of weight. “I couldn’t even spruce up my garden at home without breaking into buckets of sweat,” he laments.

As much as he wants to blame his erratic schedule for his weight woes, Chef Wan knows that the onus is on him to care for his well-being. Besides, the popular chef and cookshow host doesn’t have to look far for a reminder to eat better.

“My late father was diabetic and lost a leg due to the disease. He then had a stroke and passed away in 2012. I don’t want to suffer the same fate as him,” he says. Chef Wan knows that he has to get his act sorted and thus he has begun his journey to better health from where he is the most comfortable – the kitchen.

So does that mean no more santan – which has about 35 calories in a tablespoon (15g) – in rendang, nasi lemak,

sweet desserts and kuih for Chef Wan? According to him, that is a big, fat yes.

That is quite rich, given that Chef Wan made his name, and wealth, making and promoting exactly those mouth-watering and fattening food items on his television series and cookbooks all these years.

“I know that those are the types of food that I created and promoted. But I have gotten older, and I have to start thinking about my health. I have come to that age. As a chef, I understand my responsibility to promote healthy eating habits, and it starts with me.”

Chef Wan also calls out on folks who dismiss healthy eating simply because it is pricier. “Don’t be penny wise and pound foolish. Unless you have a garden at home that grows all the vegetables you want, or a farm that gives you fresh milk every morning, you cannot escape having to spend a bit more to eat healthy nowadays.”

“It is better to pay now for your health, than later (for your medical bills) when you are bed-ridden and feeling awful. Be wise with your eating habits, it will help prolong your life.”

“Even when you tell the waiters that you want your drinks less sweet or your food less oily, they still somehow come out sweet and oily. You cannot always dictate how the cook prepares your food and what goes into it,” he says.

“I am not saying that you should totally cut out local fare. But it is important that if you decide to eat healthy, there are places for you to do so,” he explains. So when BMS Organics came knocking with a new collaboration, Chef Wan knew that it was an opportunity not to be missed. This was his chance to show consumers that food, even local favourites like nasi lemak and curry lakas can be prepared the healthy way and be easily available.

BMS Organics is a leading organic health food producer and supplier with 43 outlets around the country. Nineteen of these outlets are equipped with adjoining cafes that serve food made in a healthy manner.

With Chef Wan on board, healthy becomes delicious as well. The company approached the chef to collaborate with their kitchen to create dishes that would be both tasty and beneficial. “Healthy food has a negative connotation; the perception is that it can never taste as good as ‘normal’ food. My honest belief is that it all depends on how you prepare the food. Of course it is going to taste different but it definitely is the healthier option,” says Chef Wan.

He gives a healthy twist to three local favourites on BMS Organics’ menu by substituting some of the original ingredients with organic products. “I use organ-

ic soy milk instead of coconut milk (50g is 55 calories per 100ml compared to coconut’s 230 calories) for the curry laksa, extra virgin coconut oil for the food, and pineapples to give a natural sweet and sour taste in the dishes.

“There are many changes that one can make to the dishes to make them healthier when cooking at home. You just have to be creative to come up with as many substitutes as possible,” he adds. Chef Wan suggests using Himalayan rock salt instead of the normal salt, brown rice, millet or buckwheat to substitute for rice, and adding lots of fresh herbs to the food.

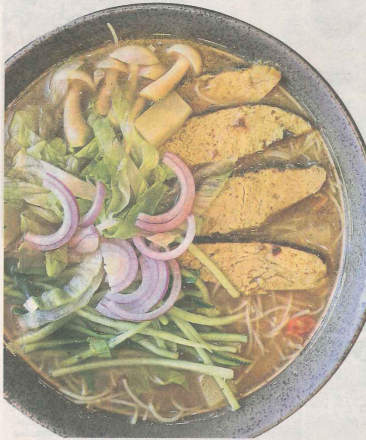
“The dishes I have prepared for BMS Organics are meat-free but you can always add meat to any of the dishes if you wish,” he says. He working on creating more healthy dishes for BMS Organics and is already incorporating his newfound ideology in his daily life.

“I really want to turn my style of cooking around. I know that I was guilty of using lots of santan and sugar in my recipes before, but it is never too late to amend my cooking and eating habits. It’s the same for you.”

And with a big smile, he adds, “I have been taking care of myself recently and look at me, can you tell that I am 59? I don’t think so.”



Asam laksa



Chef Wan is working on creating more healthy dishes in the future and is already practising this new ideology in his daily life.



Nasi lemak with soy chicken rendang



Organic soy milk curry laksa

Heat grapeseed oil in a wok on medium heat. Fry the chili paste until fragrant. Add the wet paste and continue to fry until aromatic. Meanwhile, dissolve the soy milk powder in the water.

When the spice paste is ready, pour the soy milk into the wok. Add star anise, cinnamon, curry leaves and lemongrass.

### ORGANIC SOY MILK CURRY LAKSA

Making the broth from soy milk powder provides convenience, but you can replace the soy milk powder and water with 4.3 litres of unsweetened soy milk, preferably homemade from organic soy beans.

Serves 10

- 3.5 litres water
- 800g soy milk powder
- 12 stalks lemongrass, bruised
- 30g curry leaves
- 37g natural rock salt
- 20g organic seasoning powder (optional)
- Wet paste (blend and fry until fragrant)
- 300g onion, sliced
- 300g galangal, sliced
- 100g dried chilli paste (cili boh)
- 50g turmeric, sliced
- 50g candlenut, roughly crushed
- 20g coriander seeds
- 10g ginger, sliced
- 10g garlic
- 150ml grapseeed oil

### 750g brown rice vermicelli

- Garnishing
- cooked lady’s fingers
- cooked brinjal, cut into batons
- cooked potato, cubed
- cooked or raw long beans, cut into 3cm lengths
- tofu puffs, halved
- fried bean curd sheets
- sprouts (soy bean, pea, etc)
- herbs (mint, basil, etc)

Heat the water in a stock pot or casserole pan to just warm it. Stir in the soy powder until dissolved completely. Bring to a low boil on medium heat. Add the lemongrass, curry leaves, salt and seasoning powder. Bring to a boil. Add the wet paste and stir well. Allow to simmer over medium low heat for about 10 minutes. Scald the vermicelli in boiling water until cooked. Drain well.

To serve  
Place some vermicelli in a bowl. Top with your choice of garnishing. Ladle piping hot laksa broth over to cover the noodles completely and serve immediately.

- 4 seaweed squares
- 1 red chili
- 100ml grapseeed oil

- 1 tsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tomato, mashed
- 200g pineapple, sliced and mashed
- 75g brown rice vermicelli

- Garnishing
- 6 slices vegetarian (soy) fish
- 30g lettuce, shredded
- 30g cucumber, shredded
- 30g pineapple, shredded
- 1/2 onion, sliced
- 2 cili padi, sliced

Boil the vegetarian soup in a large pot on medium heat. Add salt to taste and the wet paste, vinegar, tomato, and pineapple. Simmer on medium heat until aromatic. Meanwhile, scald the vermicelli in boiling water until cooked. Drain well.

To serve:  
Place some vermicelli in a bowl. Top with soy fish slices and ladle piping hot laksa broth over to cover noodles completely. Garnish as desired and serve immediately.

### NASI LEMAK WITH SOY CHICKEN RENDANG

Serves 6-8

- 200ml grapseeed oil
- 80g dried chilli paste (cili boh)
- 200g soy milk powder
- 600ml water

- 1 star anise
- 1/2 cinnamon
- 20g curry leaves
- 6 stalks lemongrass, lightly bruised
- 300g vegetarian (soy) chicken, cubed
- 1/2 tsp seasoning powder

natural salt, to taste

- Wet paste (blended together)
- 600g galangal, sliced
- 100g turmeric, sliced
- 20g ginger, sliced
- 150g candlenut, roughly chopped
- 40g coriander seeds

For rice

- 3 cups brown rice
- 1/2 cup millet
- 1/2 cup buckwheat
- 20g ginger, sliced
- 1 tsp natural rock salt
- 3 tsp grapseeed oil
- 4 1/2 cups water

To serve:  
Place some vermicelli in a bowl. Top with soy fish slices and ladle piping hot laksa broth over to cover noodles completely. Garnish as desired and serve immediately.

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Place some vermicelli in a bowl. Top with your choice of garnishing. Ladle piping hot laksa broth over to cover the noodles completely and serve immediately.

Organic soy milk curry laksa