

Teochew porridge dishes tend to be savoury, so go easy on the condiments.



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HAWKER FOOD THAT'S ACTUALLY GOOD FOR YOU

With our expert tips, you can now dig into these dishes without guilt. **BY ESTELLE LOW**

The hawker centre is every weight-watchers' nightmare. You're confronted with all sorts of fat-laden food: char kway teow, chicken rice, laksa, Hokkien fried mee, nasi lemak, Indian rojak...

Thankfully, less sinful and equally sumptuous options exist, so there's no need to swear off everything. The following are considerably lower in fat and sodium – culprits of obesity and related diseases – and higher in protein and fibre, the building blocks of a healthy diet.

All foodies at heart, the team sniffed out stalls worth visiting and got two experts – Jaclyn Reutens, clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants, who is also a *Shape* advisory board member, and Jolyn Wong, dietitian at Dayspring Corporate Wellness – to reveal their best ordering and eating strategies. Consider your hawker food dilemma resolved!



PHOTOGRAPHY: ZAPHS ZHANG & DARREN CHANG ART DIRECTION: LANA NGUYEN



2 A typical portion of thunder tea rice contains one serving of mixed chopped veggies.



1 TEOCHEW PORRIDGE

Similar to economical rice, you choose a few sides to go with a bowl of watery congee. The dishes may be pre-cooked or prepared a la minute. Steamed fish, minced pork, braised duck, salted egg, tofu and stewed vegetables are common options. "You can easily achieve a balanced meal if you select the dishes carefully," says Jaclyn.

SHAPE'S PICK Teo Heng Porridge
#01-56 Hong Lim Market & Food Centre
OPENING HOURS 8am-1.30pm (weekdays only)

PRICE Fish and seafood vary with market prices. Other dishes start at \$1.

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT This stall has a wide variety of fresh fish and meat to satisfy picky eaters. They are deftly cooked a la minute.

WE ASK JACLYN...

What to order? "When dining with a friend, I'd order two vegetable dishes – preferably dark, leafy greens – plus a fish. Any fish is fine, as long as it's not deep fried. Each diner should get a palm-sized serving of fish."

How to choose? "Pick steamed or lightly stir-fried food. Avoid battered stuff, like sweet and sour pork, or dishes with a thick layer of oil on the gravy's surface."

How to make it healthier? "Stint on the condiments, especially the fermented soya beans which add unnecessary sodium to the meal. A bit of chilli for taste is fine."

2 THUNDER TEA RICE

White or brown rice is topped with various finely chopped vegetables like cabbage, spinach, leek, chye sim, green beans and preserved radish, as well as tofu,

peanuts and fried ikan bilis. It's served with a green soup made from basil, mint, green tea, mugwort and coriander. "This is ideal for busy working adults, who find it hard to include vegetables in their meals," says Jolyn.

SHAPE'S PICK Hakka Thunder Tea Rice
#01-31 Tanglin Halt Market & Food Centre,
3A Commonwealth Drive

OPENING HOURS 11am-7.30pm (closed on Mondays)

PRICE \$3.50 for white rice; \$4 for brown rice

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT Ingredients are evenly cooked and crunchy, so every mouthful has plenty of bite. Peanuts and ikan bilis add flavour, and when eaten with a dash of sambal chilli, the dish reminds this writer of nasi lemak – with less fat, of course.

WE ASK JOLYN...

Why thunder tea rice? "It has a wide variety of vegetables, which is challenging to find in other hawker dishes. A standard serving contains 7g of fibre – one-third of the daily required fibre intake (20g) for women. The veggies are rich in potassium that helps regulate blood pressure, and the peanuts and brown rice provide antioxidant-rich selenium."

How to make it healthier? "Go for the brown rice version – extra vitamins and antioxidants from whole grains, plus more fibre. Despite the tofu, peanuts and ikan bilis, this dish is a little inadequate in protein. I'd add more tofu, or have more lean meat at the next meal." ▶

81% of Singaporeans eat hawker food when they're not dining at home.

SOURCE: WEBER SHANDWICK



3 Fish soup is rich in protein, fibre, vitamin B and zinc.

3 FISH SOUP

With little fat added in the cooking process, it's no wonder fish soup ranks high on every smart eater's list. The ingredients – sliced fish, tofu, tomatoes, seaweed, lettuce, bitter gourd or chye sim – offer a good balance of lean protein, carbs and fibre. Avoid the fried fish version as that almost triples the amount of fat in the dish, says Jaclyn.

SHAPE'S PICK Leng Kee

#02-192 Bukit Timah Market & Food Centre

OPENING HOURS 9am-8pm (closed on Wednesdays)

PRICE From \$4

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT The soup is clear and light, and generously filled with batang (mackerel) fish slices. We much prefer this over the muddy-tasting catfish used by some other stalls. Even better, this stall doesn't do the fried fish version.

WE ASK JACLYN...

Rice or noodles? "Nutritionally and calorie-wise, they're about the same. What's more important is the portion size. As a rule of thumb, I'd have about three-quarters of the rice or noodles if I don't work out at least thrice a week."

Milk or without? "Adding evaporated milk to your fish soup wouldn't alter the nutritional profile significantly. The serving amount is usually one tablespoon at most."

How to make it healthier? "If you can, ask to

add more vegetables and choose bitter gourd or chye sim over lettuce as they are more nutritious. Also ask for less rice if you are watching your weight or aren't very physically active, and steer clear of ee mee (deep fried egg noodles) as the calorie count is high."

4 YONG TAU FOO

This Hakka dish is popular for good reason: You build your own bowl by hand-picking assorted vegetables and tofu items stuffed with fish paste or a ground meat mixture. The ingredients are boiled and/or fried, then served dry or in a soup. They are eaten on their own, or with rice or noodles.

SHAPE'S PICK Rong Xing Yong Tau Fu

#02-04 Tanjong Pagar Plaza Market & Food Centre

OPENING HOURS 6.30am-2.30pm (closed on Mondays)

PRICE From \$3 (depending on how many pieces you choose)

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT Ingredients are freshly made every day by the friendly stall owners, who start work at 2.30am. Bonus points for the plump fish paste and ground meat stuffing. Warning: Be prepared to wait for up to 30 minutes at lunchtime.

WE ASK JOLYN...

Soup or dry? "I usually order yong tau foo

4 Pick items stuffed with fish paste instead of ground meat, which is high in fat.





THE EXPERTS



JACLYN REUTENS,
Clinical dietitian
at Aptima Nutrition &
Sports Consultants



JOLYN WONG,
Dietitian at Dayspring
Corporate Wellness



5 Choose your dosa wisely; the plain one lacks protein.

with soup, but I don't drink the soup as it tends to be high in sodium. If I'm having it dry, I'd ask for sweet sauce and chilli on the side, and have it sparingly."

Rice or noodles? "The calorie differences between white rice, thick or thin bee hoon, and kway teow are slight. I usually have thin bee hoon as I like its mouthfeel. Egg noodles are the most calorie-dense."

What to choose? "Go for vegetable-based ingredients with fish paste, such as okra, red or green chilli, bitter melon and eggplant, as they are higher in fibre, and lower in sodium when compared to more processed items like seaweed chicken, hotdogs and crabsticks. Stay away from items with ground meat as the stuffing is usually made from fatty meat parts. And include at least two leafy green vegetables, like kang kong and watercress, as well as tofu for sufficient protein."

How to make it healthier? "Avoid everything fried, and go easy on the sodium-rich sweet sauce and chilli sauce. Have no more than one dessert spoon (three teaspoons) of each."

SHAPE'S PICK S. P. Vilas

#01-286 Tekka Market & Food Centre

OPENING HOURS 6am-10.30pm (daily)

PRICE \$1.50 for egg or masala dosa;

\$2 for two plain dosa

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT Of all the stalls we tried, this one wins because its dosa is soft on the inside and crispy outside. Plus, there are 16 types of dosa to choose from, and meat dishes (mutton and chicken) are available on weekends.

WE ASK JACLYN...

Which dosa to order? "It may be low in fat and calories, but I wouldn't recommend eating just plain dosa for a meal, as it's lacking in protein. I'd take an egg dosa which has more protein, plus a serving of chana masala (chickpea curry) for extra protein and fibre. If you're ordering masala dosa instead of egg dosa, have just half a standard portion as the potato filling makes it carb-heavy."

How to make it healthier? "If the stall offers other veggies besides chickpeas, order a portion to increase your fibre intake and keep you full for longer. If not, have a small apple or wedge of papaya after the meal. Skip the coconut-based sambar as it is usually high in fat and salt." **E**

5 DOSA

A fermented crepe made from rice flour and ground lentils, dosa is considered a healthier Indian food option. "It is very much lower in fat compared to Indian rojak or mee goreng and roti prata," says Jaclyn. Dosa comes in many variations, such as egg, cheese or masala (stuffed with spiced potatoes). It is typically served with sambar (a vegetable-based dip) and chutney.