

Post-*iftar* feasting raises health concerns

➤ Overindulgence during 'moreh' meal may disrupt metabolic processes, cause weight gain: Dietitian

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PETALING JAYA: *Moreh*, a popular Malaysian tradition of enjoying a light meal after *tarawih* prayers, is intended as a way to refuel after a day of fasting.

However, in recent years *moreh* has turned into an extravagant feast, raising concerns about overeating, especially late at night.

Universiti Putra Malaysia research associate and dietitian Prof Dr Barakatun Nisak Mohd Yusof said *moreh* should be approached cautiously to avoid excessive calorie intake and potential health risks.

"The food spread often consists of high-calorie, fried or sugary foods such as *kuih-muih*, *nasi lemak*, *mee goreng* and sweetened drinks.

"Many people eat late at night without portion control, which can lead to weight gain, poor digestion and metabolic disturbances."

She said consuming large, calorie dense meals at night can lead to fat accumulation, as the body's metabolism naturally slows down during these hours.

"Heavy meals can cause bloating, indigestion and acid reflux, especially when lying down so soon after eating.

"One of the biggest concerns is the impact on sleep. High fat and sugary foods can interfere with the production of *melatonin* (a hormone that regulates night and day cycles or sleep-wake cycles) leading to poor sleep quality and disrupted sleep patterns," she added.

Barakatun Nisak said some people believe fasting during the day justifies overeating at night, but excessive consumption of high-calorie, carbohydrate rich foods can have serious metabolic consequences.

"Eating late at night, even if it's a balanced meal, can impair glucose metabolism and reduce insulin sensitivity.

"It also disrupts the body's natural metabolic processes, which are tuned to



Experts advocate moderation during *moreh* by consuming healthier and balanced portions of the variety of food offered. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

daytime eating, potentially causing hormonal imbalances that contribute to weight gain."

She said the mindset that fasting "earns" the right to eat more makes it difficult to promote healthier *moreh* choices.

"*Moreh* is not a necessity and should be a light and nutritious snack rather than a full meal. If one chooses to have *moreh*, it should include protein rich foods to maintain muscle mass and fibre rich options to aid digestion and provide sufficient hydration.

"Plain water or drinks with minimal sugar should be prioritised."

She advised that if healthier servings are unavailable, portions should be kept small to avoid turning *moreh* into a third full meal.

"*Moreh* is more than just a meal – it is a time for togetherness, reflection and strengthening bonds with family, friends and the community after *tarawih*.

"While food plays a role in this gathering, it should reflect the spirit of Ramadan, focusing on moderation, nourishment and balance rather than overindulgence."

Barakatun Nisak added that since *moreh* is

deeply rooted in Malaysian culture, mosques and suraus could lead by example by offering healthier, balanced options without compromising tradition.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia public health medicine specialist Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh also voiced concern over excessive eating during Ramadan, despite the emphasis on modesty and self-restraint.

"Abstaining from eating during Ramadan is a form of intermittent fasting. The intention should be to break fast with water and dates, followed by a light meal after prayers.

"Overindulgence, especially during *iftar* and *moreh*, goes against the spirit of Ramadan and can lead to food and drink wastage."

Sharifa Ezat urged people to practise mindfulness and healthy eating habits in their food intake as food wastage increases significantly during Ramadan.

"Proper and healthy eating habits should be encouraged. Families should educate themselves on mindful eating and prevent overindulging during *iftar*, *moreh* and *sahur* (pre-dawn meal)."