

Media : Borneo Post (Kuching)

Date : 26 July 2018

Ajinomoto believes umami can aid elderly to enhance appetite

KUCHING: Japan may be the first country that faced an "elderly boom," but this segment of the population is increasing all around the world.

From France, where a quarter of the population is over 60 years of age, to the countries of Southeast Asia, where the average of reached 9.6 percent in 2016, the world is turning its attention to the care of its most senior members.

Japan has spearheaded the concept of the "healthy lifespan."

The idea is actually quite simple: longevity may be wonderful, but it's a lot better if the elderly can be happy, active, productive, and self-sufficient.

As a result, much attention is being paid to not only helping people live longer, but also living healthier into their old age. And it's clear that many other countries share the same goal.

A variety of physical changes decrease people's ability to gain necessary nutrition when they get older.

Many people in this age group use dental prosthetics, which



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can change the taste of foods due to the metal they contain.

There is a reduction in the

number of taste receptors in the mouth and that, which leads to a decrease in the ability

to taste foods, and at the same time the ability to secrete saliva decreases, making it harder to

swallow.

And there is a total loss of muscle strength in the jaw and tongue, adding further difficulty to a process that most of us take for granted: eating.

Of course, umami, the basic taste of monosodium glutamate (MSG), can't help with every physical problem that can lead to decreased nutrition in the elderly, but according to recent research, it may have a positive impact on some of them.

One study showed that 37 percent of elderly subjects had an impaired sense of taste, and that among subjects categorized as "unhealthy," nearly half were taste-impaired.

In addition, it was found that most taste-impaired subjects were not able to secrete a sufficient amount of saliva. And it is easy to understand that a reduced ability to taste foods, together with difficulty swallowing, could contribute to a decrease in appetite, which leads to a downward spiral that has serious health consequences.

Salivation is important for more than just swallowing.

It also plays a vital role in oral health by flushing away bacteria, which keeps away bad breath. In addition, saliva in the mouth begins the digestion processes of dietary starch, which is abundant in rice, pasta, potatoes, and bread.

The good news is that umami might be part of the answer. First of all, the entire point of using umami seasoning—or any kind of seasoning—is to increase the palatability of food.

But more than this, umami has been shown to increase total salivation more than any other basic taste—even sour.

To fully leverage the potential benefits of MSG and umami, Ajinomoto Co Inc (Ajinomoto) strongly believes that evidence-based scientific research is essential.

"As evidence continues to accumulate that umami may help the elderly, and as the needs of this increasing population continue to increase around the world, we will fully explore ways to help the most senior members of society to stay healthy," it said.