

Staying Healthy in Thailand

By Catherine Tucker

If you're at all like me, you really like to keep a mostly healthy lifestyle. Having lived in Portland, Oregon before moving to Thailand, I was eating very healthy and being pretty active. Moving to Thailand, I knew to expect Thai food, but wasn't really sure what that meant in terms of health. Also, I had heard of there being gyms and other ways to exercise here, but until I got here, I was unsure of how to keep active.

When moving here, I immediately wanted to try everything. Excited about all of the new foods, I indulged myself in different flavors I had never tried. Looking back, I would have done things different. My present self would love to go back in time and tell me past self, "Slow down hoss! It'll all be there later!" Unfortunately, my present self was not there back in October and November to tell me all of this. Thus, I gained close to 10 pounds because of my curiosity. So I guess in this case curiosity made the Cat fat!



Not only was I overindulging in food, I was being less active. Even though I was going to the stadium (which is conveniently located near the big and new houses) and running, being in a different environment made my workouts not up to par. Not really being much of a runner in the first place, having only just started really doing so in latter part of the year I was living in Portland, running proves to be somewhat of a challenging task as the humidity can be overbearing. Because of the humidity factor and the overall heat, I was running at night, but having to wait so long to exercise does

no good things for motivation.

Alas, my first few months in Thailand were not great for my health. Not only was I gaining weight, but my body was doing weird things adjusting to its new environment. What I have gathered is that it is pretty much unavoidable getting sick when you first get here. Whether its cold-like symptoms or the runs, your body will definitely go, "What the F*#\$?" But, that all comes with new experiences and the things we all deal with. My word of advice on this matter would be to not be like me and try everything right away, but pace yourself. Kind of like a body warm up. Let your body know what it will be getting into before diving head first into it. Especially when it comes to spice.

As someone who was just getting into spicy food before I left, I have slowly been building up a tolerance. However, I have watched as friends and coworkers have made themselves sweat, cry, and even rash by challenging themselves to eat the spiciest of the spiciest. You may think you can do it too, but this is Thailand where the spice is on a whole other level. Once again, I say work your way up to Thai spice. And, don't try to do it all at once. Our bodies are not used to this level of spice; thus, trying to be a spice master can definitely damage it. There have been

instances of people burning ulcer-like holes in their stomachs because of eating food that is simply too hot.

When I got my November paycheck, I decided it was time to join the gym. There are a few gyms in town, but I go to Aleeza and absolutely love it there. It costs 1800baht a month or 5000baht for 3 months and is totally worth it. I'm pretty sure it's the only air-conditioned gym in Surat and the facilities are really nice. Plus, there's hardly ever anyone there! So in November, I started going to the gym again like I had been back home. Having a gym membership makes it much easier to workout because I can do it at any time of the day instead of having to wait until the sun goes down. Usually I head there right after school and shower there as well to help save water at the house, and because the showers are really nice.

Going to the gym in November and December, I wasn't really noticing many changes and felt as though I was still carrying around the weight I had gained. I decided to weigh myself one day, and lo and behold, I had definitely put on a few pounds. This was my wakeup call. I decided that I really needed to start eating healthier like I was doing back in Portland. The only way I could figure to do this was to start cooking for myself again.

Luckily, at the new house, one of my housemates has a water boiler/steamer from Big C, which can also be used for sautéing. Back in Portland, it was well known in my household that I would make a big pot of quinoa and veggies and eat that for the whole week. This is what I was going to emulate here in Thailand, but instead of quinoa I would use rice. There are a few vegetarian restaurants in town that are recognizable by the yellow flags hanging out front. Like many of the restaurants here, they have many hotel pans of food that they will scoop onto some rice. The rice they have at this particular restaurant (down the street from Thida and across the street from the Chinese temple), their rice isn't just white rice, but appears to have some different kinds of grains. Because their rice is different than the typical Thai rice, I bought a bag for about 40baht.



Not far from both houses is a market on Don Nok. If you drive down Am Phur Rd. and take a right onto Don Nok, the market is just up the street on the right. It's another night market, but has more fresh food than the night market downtown. On Sundays the Don Nok market booms with multiple clothing stalls and even sometimes housing a small carnival type area in back. It is at this market where I have decided to do most of my food shopping. Here, you can find just about anything. There are a TON of fresh veggies and fruit and all kinds of meat. In the back you can buy rice, spices, oils, sauces, and so on. If you're dying of hunger, you can also get pre-made food here. Not only is the selection great, but everything is very reasonably priced. I can get most of my food for the week for about 300baht, which is the equivalent to \$10, way less than I would spend in the states.

On the weekends I head to the market, buy a bunch of veggies and come home to start my cooking. Because we only have the one cooker, I cook the rice first, putting it aside for later. While the rice is cooking, I will chop up my veggies, preparing them to be sauteed to perfection. When the rice is done, it's time for the veggies to cook. After I feel they are at their best, I mix in the rice and call it good. Yes, you can get rice and veggies at pretty much any restaurant in town, but just like back home, you never really know what's going in there. If I cook for myself, I know exactly what's going in. No sugar, no salt, and a little oil. It may sound boring, but this



is the food I love to eat. You may choose to cook different meals, but I definitely encourage cooking if you can. I also make veggies and eggs in the morning for breakfast, which I find to be very filling and nice.

Not only have I been going to the gym and cooking healthy meals, I've also been doing yoga and meditating. I find that practicing these two things have really helped me physically and mentally. It can be challenging living and working in another country, and especially challenging working with

children. Meditating in the mornings before school has helped me with my patience and frustration. Doing yoga and meditating have really helped my mental and emotional health here in Thailand. Even though I usually just practice yoga at home, I know there is a yoga place by Super English called Yoga Classic that I've heard is quite good. I believe it costs around 250baht per class.

Just like with anything, take everything in moderation and treat yourself well. It's an easy slope to go down to become unhealthy here in Thailand. As I said, I do recommend cooking for yourself when and if you can. Eating out all of the time is never good, no matter where you are. The occasional meal out is okay, just don't over do it. However, because most houses in Thailand do not have kitchens, eating out is the only option. Just try to remember when ordering out to try to choose the healthiest option, and don't forget to exercise. There are many ways to get exercise here in Surat, whether you're running around the stadium or going to the gym, doing a bit of exercise will go a long way. Treat yourself well, and don't over do it; all of the food will still be there your whole time in Thailand. Slow down and enjoy yourself!