



When she was a nutrition undergraduate in London, Liong Suet Mei once went on an eating spree to learn more about ethnic cuisine. "I tried Indian, Middle-Eastern, Italian and Greek food. In fact, I ate more Indian food when I was in London than when I was in Singapore!"

The bubbly Suet Mei has always had a keen interest in food, though she has no aspirations to be the next Jamie Oliver. Instead, the former National Junior College student wants to use her specialised knowledge in food nutrition to help hospital patients in their rehabilitation.

"I wanted to be a Dietitian as my interest is in food, and I like to work in the healthcare sector. Practicing clinical work in a tertiary hospital appealed to me as it allowed for patient contact, and I could work with patients with different medical conditions."

The Organic Healer

Liong Suet Mei

As a **Dietitian**, who specialises in food and nutrition, **Liong Suet Mei** educates and counsels patients, and helps them manage their health through better nutrition.

Universities: King's College London, University of Sydney
Degrees: BSc (Hons) Nutrition, Masters of Nutrition and Dietetics



Assess and Recommend

A typical day for Suet Mei at National University Hospital starts at 8.30a.m. She studies the medical notes of patients whom doctors have referred to her care, and sees the patients by appointment. She assesses patients by talking to them or their caregivers, and helps them to understand the nutritional changes they have to make to their typical diet, due to their medical condition.

"I have to ensure the right therapeutic diet is ordered for my patient through a computerised catering system. I liaise with the nursing staff with regards to changes to nutrition support schedules, for patients on oral supplements or who are tube-fed. I also write discharge memos for patients who are discharged to nursing homes or community hospitals, to ensure their recommended treatment is followed through."

Independent Learning

Suet Mei's journey to becoming a Dietitian started when she took up a PSG Overseas Specialist Award (now called the MOH Health Science Scholarship) to study nutrition at King's College London, which is renowned for its nutrition and dietetics course.

"Studying at King's College was largely independent for me. The assignments were thought-provoking and made me think deeply. I read widely and critically about food supply and regulation, food safety, organic and genetically modified food, and so on. I found

the whole experience stimulating, challenging and inspiring."

After her undergraduate studies, Suet Mei furthered her education – fully sponsored by the Ministry of Health – at the University of Sydney, which was known for its post-graduate dietetics course.

"I had my first attempt in a research study on the prevalence of malnutrition in cancer outpatients in my final semester. Whew! Research requires so much time. The most gratifying part is when you finally present all your findings and make recommendations to improve current situations."

"During my Masters, the attachments in various hospitals gave me the chance to have close contact with the locals. That helped me to appreciate cultural differences and perceptions about health and life."

A Moveable Feast

Upon her return from her studies, Suet Mei started work as a new dietitian at NUH, handling more general and "straight-forward" cases such as cardiology cases. As she developed professionally, she started to handle more complex cases such as eating disorders.

Work wasn't only confined to the hospital either. "As I gained more confidence in the job, I was given the chance to give talks to companies and to the public. I also wrote articles for newspapers and magazines to

create awareness of various nutrition and health issues.

"Last year, I was the primary mentor for an undergraduate who did her clinical attachment at NUH. Just this year, I worked in critical care and surgery, providing nutritional support to patients for 2 months. I've also just taken over the care of children and teenagers with diabetes."

Suet Mei's wide scope of job responsibilities has certainly enriched her life experience. Just like how her eating spree in London delighted her taste palate all those years ago.

Healthy Eating Tips

- Eat regular meals. Don't forget to power your day with a healthful breakfast!
- Enjoy a wide variety of foods for a more balanced diet.
- Choose more whole grains, fruits & vegetables.
- You don't have to avoid any food in particular. Just eat fat & sugar in moderation.
- Go easy on salt.
- Read nutrition labels before buying food.
- Avoid fad diets.

“Not only are you taking up a scholarship, but also a career. So know what your interests are, and what you want.”