

Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021

(Sponsored content)

Tokyo nutrition summit kicks off

The Tokyo Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit 2021 is taking place on Tuesday and Wednesday under the auspices of the Japanese government. The summit builds on more than 10 years of international focus on nutrition that kicked off in 2010 with the launch of the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement.

In 2012, the World Health Assembly and 194 countries agreed on the Global Nutrition Targets, the first targets ever adopted for nutrition. Building on this momentum, the first N4G summit was held in London in 2013 after the Summer Games, with the second one held in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Now Tokyo is hosting the third N4G summit following the delayed Summer Olympics and Paralympics.

Due to COVID-19, the summit is using a hybrid format comprising online participation by people outside Japan and an in-person option for those in Japan. The Tokyo N4G Summit will be attended by high-level representatives from governments, international organizations, donors, academia, businesses and civic groups.

High-level sessions will consist of presentations and declarations of pledges by national governments and international organizations, while panel discussions will

focus on specific topics. These sessions are being organized by the Foreign Ministry, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry and the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry in light of their expertise in the three core topics of health, food and resilience. In addition, data and financing have been put on the agenda as tools fundamental to achieving the core topics.

Under health, nutrition is being pursued as an integral part of universal health coverage for sustainable development, since nutrition is essential to both preventing and treating disease. Examples of government and donor initiatives in this area include testing for early detection of malnutrition, support for breastfeeding, the provision of vitamin A to infants and development and training of dietitians.

Under food, the summit is focusing on building food systems that promote safe, sustainable and healthy diets and nutrition, as well as ensure producers' livelihoods and improve "climate-smart" practices. The private sector has a large role to play in the food chain, creating demand for and improving access to highly nutritious food, and encouraging sustainable production of healthy food and taking steps to reduce food loss.

The third topic, resilience, relates to addressing malnutrition in fragile communities affected by conflict or climate change. Expect stakeholders to take up discussions of how to balance both acute needs with long-term programs to better prepare for nutrition crises, which highlights the importance of data and data-driven accountability.

Data provides information about conflicts, droughts and other risks, while accountability ensures that the collected data is accurate and that progress is based on evidence. Mechanisms to increase transparency and accountability are another area of anticipated cooperation, while on the financing side, the focus will be on securing new investment and driving innovation in nutrition financing.

The Global Nutrition for Growth Compact was endorsed in 2013 at the first N4G Summit with pledges of more than \$4 billion and commitments by global leaders to provide nutrition intervention to pregnant women and young children, reduce stunting in children and save children's lives through increased access to food and treatment for severe acute malnutrition, among other initiatives. In response to this and other developments, the Nutrition Japan Public Private Platform (NJPPP) was launched in 2016 as a framework for public-private partnerships to build models for sustainable business, including food supply systems that can improve nutrition in developing countries.

The Tokyo N4G Summit will include progress reports detailing the outcomes achieved so far through the NJPPP, such as a program to improve nutrition in meals provided at workplaces in Southeast Asia. In addition, the summit will also emphasize commitments from governments, businesses, donors and other development partners across the three focus areas of health, food and resilience.

A look at the numbers shows the urgency of the summit's nutrition goals.

TOKYO NUTRITION FOR GROWTH SUMMIT 2021

Food, Health, & Prosperity for All

In 2019, nearly 750 million people faced a severe degree of food insecurity, and an estimated 2 billion did not have access to sufficient amounts of nutritious food. In addition, 144 million children under the age of 5, three-quarters of whom live in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, were affected by stunting in 2019 due to under- and malnutrition.

In the meantime, obesity is endemic to the problem of overnutrition and can lead to increased incidences of diabetes, heart disease and other health problems. According to the World Health Organization, around 2 billion adults (age 18 and older) were deemed overweight in 2016, representing nearly 39% of the adult population, and 13% were classified as obese.

Furthermore, many countries today are facing the so-called double burden of malnutrition, where both undernutrition and overnutrition occur at the same time. This is a phenomenon in which undernutrition strikes early in life, followed by a propensity for obesity later in life.

The summit seeks to increase the momentum for addressing these issues through its agenda and side events that include sessions organized by the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry on the theme of building healthy and sustainable food systems.

Some of the measures recently launched to tackle these issues are the Fourth Basic



How to build food systems that promote safe, sustainable and healthy diets is one of the major topics of the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth summit. GETTY IMAGES

Plan for the Promotion of Shokuiku, which aims to promote the adoption of balanced nutritional habits nationwide, and Measures for achievement of Decarbonization And Resilience with Innovation, part of a larger strategy for building sustainable, eco-friendly food systems. In the sessions, the ministry will share its experience with improving nutrition in Japan, where government-led efforts have continued for over a century.

Although washoku has become a hot export in recent years, the farm ministry is looking to do more than promote Japanese food exports by combining Japanese flavors and products with those in other countries to create community-focused, sustainable improvements in nutrition.

Food exports by Japanese companies will play a role in the farm ministry's initiatives to improve nutrition globally. Though food assistance is needed, sustaining it over the long term requires a broad base of stakeholders. This is where Japanese companies can step in with their products and technologies while localizing them for specific regions. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to solving the world's nutrition challenges. So in addition to companies, the ministry is looking to enlist the sup-

port of young people and nongovernmental organizations passionate about the future of food and nutrition so programs targeting specific regions and issues can be formulated.

Nutrition issues are at a turning point and have been exacerbated by global disruptions from COVID-19, climate change and geopolitical tensions. Adding to this urgency, the final year for the Global Nutrition Targets adopted in 2012 is 2025, and the target year for achieving the U.N. sustainable development goals (SDGs) is 2030, less than a decade away. The Tokyo N4G Summit is expected to both celebrate the N4G commitments made so far this year and issue a 2021 compact that pursues accelerated achievement of the Global Nutrition Targets and the SDGs. As the host, the Japanese government is organizing the summit and seeking to secure meaningful commitments from high-level political representatives and global business leaders as well as donors and civic groups who want to work together to end the problems of hunger and nutrition.

Information about the Tokyo N4G Summit and side events can be found at <https://nutritionforgrowth.org/events/>.



A mother holds her starving daughter at a clinic in Abi Adi, Ethiopia, in May. Hunger got drastically worse in 2020, the U.N. said in July, and a multiagency report estimates up to 811 million people suffered from malnutrition last year. AP/VIA KYODO

- Democrat vs. Republican
- America vs. China
- White vs. Black
- Economy vs. Ecology
- Wealth vs. Health
- Urban vs. Rural
- Government vs. People
- Dogs vs. Cats
- Coffee vs. Tea
- Man vs. Woman
- Monopoly vs. Share
- Privacy vs. Surveillance
- Politics vs. Science
- Think vs. Do
- Reject vs. Embrace
- You vs. Me
- Argument vs. Dialogue

Where there's division, there's an opportunity for progress.

#BeyondVS

Dialogue matters.

the japan times

Euglena SUPERFOOD

59 kinds of essential nutrients to optimize one's health

13 Vitamins

Benefits from health to sustainability for humanity and the planet

19 Amino Acids

9 Minerals

12 Unsaturated Fatty Acids

6 Other Nutrients

Hybrid microalgae to solve global nutrition problems

Children eating Euglena cookies in Bangladesh

Learn more

イグレナ

global@euglena.jp

<https://www.euglena.jp/en/whatisueuglena/>



Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021

(Sponsored content)

Over a century of nutrition research and practice

The world is facing a new nutrition reality where persistent undernutrition and escalating overnutrition coexist even within individual populations. This double burden of malnutrition imposes a set of new challenges for policy and program development. With less than five years left to achieve the World Health Assembly's targets for maternal, infant and young child nutrition, and 10 years to reach the U.N. sustainable development goals (SDGs), the third Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit will be held in Tokyo from Tuesday to Wednesday.

The summit aims to foster a common understanding of key actions to improve nutrition worldwide and provide a forum for discussions under five themes: integrating nutrition with universal health coverage; building food systems; promoting resilience; promoting data-driven accountability; and ensuring financing for nutrition. Diverse stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, the private sector and society, will be encouraged to review their policies, measures and strategies and present new funding plans or policy commitments to accelerate the implementation of their initiatives.

As the host and a country with one of the highest life expectancies, Japan is ready to share its expertise accumulated over more than 100 years. A rich history of this nation's dedication to nutrition improvement can provide useful insights into how the world can bring an end to long-standing nutrition-related issues and achieve a brighter, more prosperous future for all.

Origin of commitment

Japan's nutrition-related initiative dates back to the late 19th century, when the country started its new life as a modern nation. To tackle nutritional deficiencies caused by food insecurity, Dr. Tadasu Saiki established the world's first nutrition research institute privately in 1914, which was relaunched in 1920 as the National Institute of Nutrition, predecessor to the National Institute of Health and Nutrition (NIHN). The institute invested



One of the pillars of Japan's nutritional success in comparison with other countries is the large number of nutrition specialists working at a variety of public facilities nationwide.

THE JAPAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

substantial resources in collecting and analyzing data, such as the nutrient composition of major food items and the dietary intake per capita as determined from household surveys, accumulating a large volume of scientifically valuable data. This allowed the government to gain insights into the public's nutritional status and take appropriate measures, paving the way for the national nutrition policy of "leave no one behind."

After World War II, with assistance from abroad, Japan overcame nutritional deficiencies in a remarkably short time through various nationwide activities led by nutritional specialists. Of particular note is the annual nutrition survey that began in 1945. According to Dr. Hidemi Takimoto, chief of the Department of Nutritional Epidemiology and Shokuiku at the NIHN, this survey originally targeted Tokyo residents and was later conducted nationwide. "Even during the difficult times after the war, the government was aware of the importance of monitoring people's nutritional status in developing nutrition policy," Takimoto said. Except for 2020 and 2021, when the survey was suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic, this survey has been conducted annually for over 75 years, helping Japan continuously advance its policy according to the changing needs of the times.

Japan is one of the rare countries to establish nationwide nutrition improvement programs ahead of its economic development. With the start of the overnutrition era, which coincided with Japan's high economic growth spurt from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, the survey was expanded to include blood pressure measurements in response to the rise of new nutrition challenges, such as those posed by obesity and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

This forward-thinking policy allowed Japan to make substantial gains in life expectancy in tandem with the increase in the gross domestic product. In 1985, it reached the highest level of longevity in the world, with a healthier older population and lower obesity rates than other developed nations.

Japan's nutrition policy

Japan's health and nutrition policy consists of three main elements: educational activities based on diet, training and nationwide deployment of specialists; and a policymaking process based on scientific evidence. With these core elements, Japan has been promoting nutritional programs that cover people throughout their lives from infants to the elderly, as well as those who are sick, injured or victims of disaster.

The first element focuses on promoting diet or eating style. The traditional Japanese diet is characterized by ingredient diversity and meals that often consist of a staple food, a main dish and a side dish for ideal

nutritional balance. Educating people to pay attention to the appropriate timing for meals, as well as the importance of communication and interaction at the table, is also essential.

Japanese learn firsthand about this concept from an early age through school lunch programs. By serving lunch to their classmates, they gain a visual understanding of appropriate portion size and how various dishes go together.

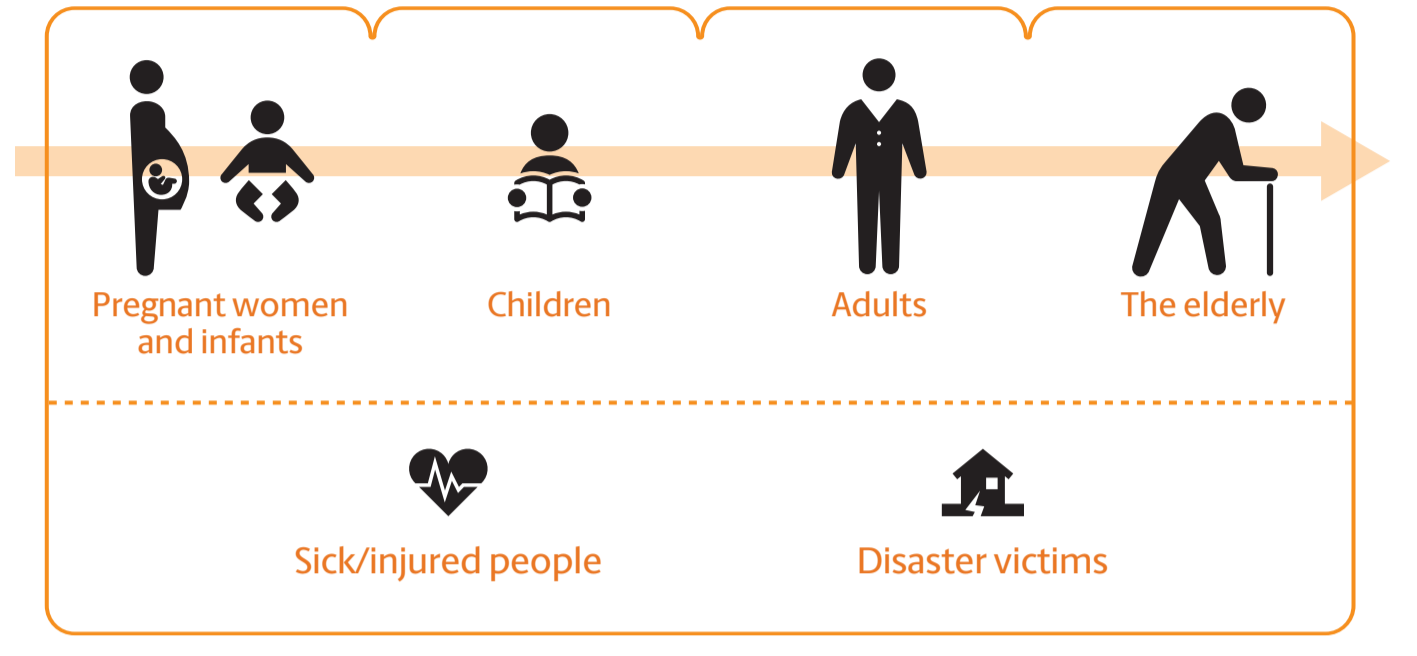
The second element, which affects a wider range of people, involves sending trained specialists and volunteers to manage nutrition at various facilities nationwide. These specialists also provide nutritional guidance to local communities to disseminate proper dietary knowledge and nutrition skills based on region-specific needs. Their activities play an important role in *shokuiku*, as food and nutrition education is called in Japan.

Food services provided at schools, company cafeterias and hospitals in Japan are carefully managed by registered dietitians (RDs) and other nutritional specialists, with close attention paid to balance. This system started about 100 years ago when Saiki envisioned a society with better nourishment for all. He established the Nutrition School in 1924 to train specialists to provide dietary guidance and manage food services to address nutritional deficiencies. Dietitian training was legislated by the Dietitians Act of 1947, which was partially revised in 1962 amid rising demand for more advanced dietary management to address the rising prevalence of NCDs, providing the foundation for the current registered dietitian system.

RDs and dietitians are active in various settings, including hospitals, schools and elder care facilities, to name just a few. Working closely with specialists in other fields, they tailor their approach to each site's unique needs. Additionally, they provide dietary guidance to organizations, including businesses and medical institutes, and people whose lives have been disrupted by disaster. "Registered dietitians are nationally licensed nutritional specialists, and their role, together with the nationwide network of professional dietitians, characterizes Japan's nutrition policy," Takimoto explained. Their advanced skills and expertise are also contributing to developing dietitian systems in Vietnam and other countries.

The final element is a well-structured framework where scientific evidence feeds the government's decision-making process. Under this framework, the government has formulated various health promotion initiatives at both the national and local levels to reduce health disparities across regions. One notable example is the Smart Life Project initiated in 2011 that aims to

Japan's nutrition policy covers all stages of life, as well as the ill and disaster victims.



SOURCE: "NUTRITION POLICY IN JAPAN TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND," HEALTH, LABOR AND WELFARE MINISTRY

JAPAN TIMES GRAPHIC



Left: After World War II, with overseas assistance, Japan overcame nutritional deficiencies thanks to various activities based on evidence from the Nutrition Survey. Right: Japanese children learn the concept of *shokuiku* (food and nutrition education) at an early age through school lunch programs. HEALTH, LABOR AND WELFARE MINISTRY; PUBLIC INTEREST INCORPORATED FOUNDATION JAPAN ASSOCIATION FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL LUNCH



create a society in which everyone, including those who are not especially health-conscious, can be healthy. It encourages voluntary, effective health promotion activities throughout society, including the development of food products and menus for reducing sodium intake and increasing vegetable consumption.

In Japan, *shokuiku* has been promoted in cooperation with nutrition policy. The Basic Plan for the Promotion of *Shokuiku* has been redrawn every five years since 2006 to affirm the government's commitment to promoting healthy dietary habits at home, school and within one's community. The fourth plan began in March, with *shokuiku* positioned as part of Japan's action plan to contribute to achieving sustainability in

line with the SDGs. Taking into account the global context for nutrition issues, the plan calls for efforts to promote *shokuiku* with a focus on lifetime physical and mental health, sustainable food and nutrition and responses to the new normal and digitalization. In the next five years, the government will cooperate with various stakeholders to develop *shokuiku* further as a national campaign and achieve common goals.

These developments in Japan's health and nutrition policy mean the country is entering a new phase and ready to extend its reach worldwide. Takimoto expressed her hopes for the upcoming N4G summit, saying "I see this summit as an opportunity to reaffirm the fact that nutrition is fundamental to good health and take action toward ensur-

ing equal access to safe and nutritious food." Takimoto will speak about child nutrition at one of the side events during N4G.

Global challenges

The pandemic has damaged food supply chains and delivered an economic blow to households, and the world can no longer afford to delay acting on the global challenge of malnutrition. One bright note, however, is that what the world is facing today is not new to Japan. With vast experience and knowledge accumulated through intensive research over more than a century, Japan believes it can offer a solution to global nutritional challenges and help achieve a caring and resilient society where no one will be left behind.

History of Japanese nutrition: 'Leave no one behind'

Japan began promoting nutritional activities around the Meiji Restoration in 1868, laying the foundation for what would become a national effort in 1920 leading to the National Institute of Nutrition and the Private Nutrition School. After World War II, Japan rebounded from the devastation and starvation that followed by creating nutrition improvement activities, an annual survey, school lunch programs and community outreach efforts, all centered around the three core elements of "diets, specialists and evidence." Today, Japan is known for its longevity and is continuously adjusting to the nutrition challenges of the times.

Nutritional efforts in lead-up to Japan's 'economic miracle'

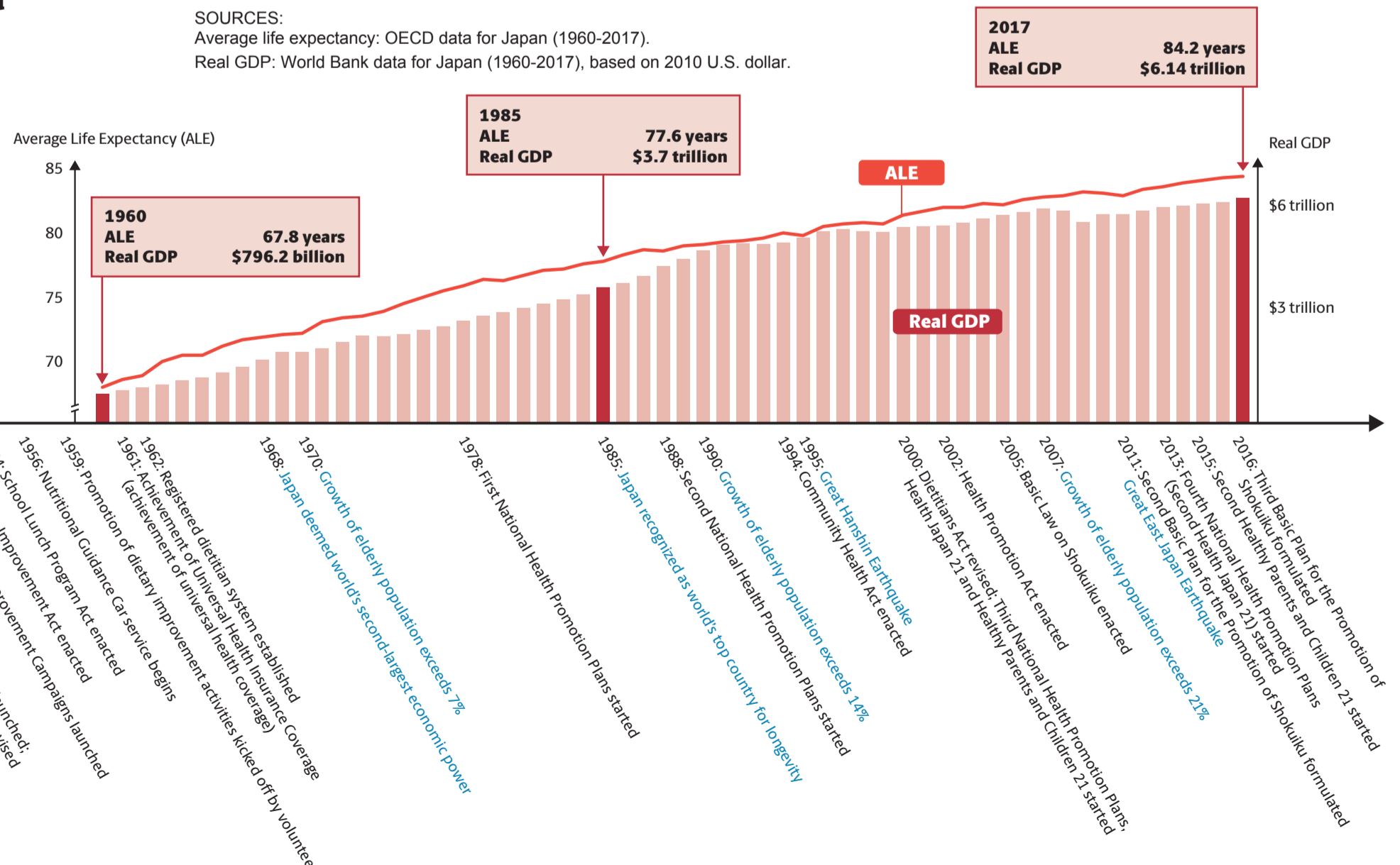
- 1904: National Institute of Nutrition established
- 1913: Great Kanto Earthquake
- 1924: Private Nutrition School founded by Dr. Tadasu Saiki
- 1926: The first 15 graduates of the Private Nutrition School begin working as dietary instructors
- 1937: Health Center Law enacted
- 1940: Rules for the encouragement of the private Child Health Handbook published
- 1942: Handbook for the encouragement of school lunches formulated
- 1945: End of WWII
- 1946: National Nutrition Survey started
- 1947: School lunch program for urban areas launched
- 1948: Medical Care Act enacted; Health Center Law revised
- 1949: Dietitians Act enacted; Health Center Law revised
- 1952: Nutrition Improvement Campaigns launched
- 1954: School Lunch Program Act enacted
- 1959: Promotion of dietary improvement activities kicked off by volunteers
- 1962: Registered dietitian system established
- 1963: Achievement of universal health coverage
- 1968: Japan deemed world's second-largest economic power
- 1970: Growth of elderly population exceeds 7%
- 1978: First National Health Promotion Plans started
- 1985: Japan recognized as world's top country for longevity
- 1988: Second National Health Promotion Plans started
- 1990: Growth of elderly population exceeds 14%
- 1994: Community Health Act enacted
- 1995: Great Hanshin Earthquake
- 2000: Dietitians Act revised; Third National Health Promotion Plans started
- 2002: Health Promotion Act enacted
- 2005: Basic Law on Shokuiku enacted
- 2007: Growth of elderly population exceeds 21%
- 2011: Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Shokuiku formulated
- 2013: Fourth National Health Promotion Plans (Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Shokuiku) started
- 2016: Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Shokuiku formulated

Era of countering nutritional deficiencies caused by food insecurity

Era of addressing noncommunicable diseases during high economic growth

Era of taking on more complex nutrition challenges

SOURCES:
Average life expectancy: OECD data for Japan (1960-2017).
Real GDP: World Bank data for Japan (1960-2017), based on 2010 U.S. dollar.



Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021

(Sponsored content)

Japan helping Asian neighbors address nutrition problems

Global leaders have committed to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030 as part of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs), but malnutrition still remains the biggest challenge in the world.

Ahead of Tokyo Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit 2021 on Tuesday and Wednesday, Japanese nutrition experts say Japan's expertise from past experiences could play a pivotal role in helping other nations address their nutrition issues.

In Japan, various facilities from schools and company cafeterias to hospitals offer healthy balanced food services with nutritional specialists who provide dietary guidance.

Though most Japanese people take this for granted, Teiji Nakamura, president of both the Japan Dietetic Association and Kanagawa University of Human Services, said this is the result of long-time government efforts to promote food and nutrition education and make the job of dietitian an established occupation in Japan.

"Japan has one of the highest ratios of dietitians per population in the world," Nakamura said.

According to the health ministry, there were over 250,000 registered dietitians in Japan as of 2020. "In other countries, nutrition specialists exist in academic circles, but they tend to be researchers at universities more than practitioners who make sure healthy balanced food is offered at various facilities," Nakamura said.

Western countries also have nutritional specialists, but they usually work at hospitals and other specialized institutions, and

healthy people don't have as much association with such specialists in everyday life as in Japan, Nakamura claimed.

Thanks to its focus on dietitians and nutrition education, Japan today is known around the world for having healthy dietary habits and strong longevity.

Japan had been engaged in nutrition improvement activities even before World War II because its populace often suffered from nutritional deficiencies caused by food shortages.

Soon after the war, school lunch programs began and many companies started to provide meals at company cafeterias. Under the government's nutrition improvement campaigns dietitians at health centers started advising communities by teaching sensible cooking methods and distributing educational materials.

Due to such efforts, despite the devastating war, Japan overcame severe food shortages in the first decade afterward, rebuilt its cities, focused on manufacturing and went on to achieve tremendous economic growth. As it became more affluent, the number of overweight people also grew but Japan managed to curb it, Nakamura added.

"Our country has experienced both undernutrition and overnutrition, the problems that many countries in the world are still suffering from, and we managed to overcome both problems in the past 70 years and become the country with the world's highest longevity rate," he stressed.

Based on its own experience, Japan has

exported nutrition improvement programs to other Asian countries, helping them to create healthy populations.

Vietnam is one of the first countries that Japan supported in this area. While some people in Vietnam still suffer from under-nutrition and low body weight, obesity and diabetes caused by an unbalanced diet was also becoming an issue in the country, one that Japan had already faced.

Based on Japan's experience in utilizing dietitians, Nakamura, along with the private sector and the Japan International Cooperation Agency, tried to establish a program to train dietitians in Vietnam to offer education in collaboration with the Vietnam National Institute of Nutrition.

With the support of professionals from Nakamura's association, his university and Jumonji University, the project bore fruit in September 2013, when Vietnam's first four-year bachelor's degree in nutrition was offered at Hanoi Medical University.

"To create a training program, a total of nearly 40 Japanese professionals gave lectures at Hanoi Medical University. We lectured in English, local educators translated the lectures into Vietnamese and they then created textbooks based on the lectures," Nakamura recalled.

Since the students needed to have field work as part of their training, about 10 students were invited to Japan and trained at schools, companies and other facilities where meals managed by dietitians are served.

In 2015, the Vietnamese government drafted a job code for dietitians, and for the



Japanese nutritionists gave lectures in English at Hanoi Medical University and local educators translate them into Vietnamese as part of their coursework. JAPAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

first time dietitian was recognized as an occupation in Vietnam. The country's first 43 dietitians started working in 2017. Now Vietnam has 10 universities that can produce dietitians.

Another notable project in Asia using Japan's know-how is being led by the Nutrition Japan Public Private Platform (NJPPP), a partnership that promotes nutritional improvement projects in developing countries, including Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar.

In 2016, NJPPP visited Indonesia to conduct research on the dietary environment at factories. A project was launched in 2019 to encourage workers at Japanese factories in the Kota Deltamas industrial complex to adopt healthy dietary habits.

Previously, those factories provided meals containing little vegetable content and lots of fried foods. Under the project, the menu was redesigned to offer a better balance of fats, protein and energy and to increase vegetable content, according to Ryuji Yamaguchi, executive director of NJPPP.

At the same time, factory workers were asked to use a checklist to record what they ate, while being encouraged to eat food from different food groups, such as meat, fish and green vegetables.

In 2018, an NJPPP project in Cambodia found young women of child-bearing age had low levels of folic acid, which increases the risk of neural tube defects in newborns. "Young Cambodian women eat a lot of rice, but they eat very few side dishes. So, we created fortified rice with essential micronutrients, and gave the rice to a group of female workers and monitored them for three months," Yamaguchi explained.

They also conducted a unique initiative in 2019 using blockchain technology to educate workers about nutrition. They introduced a smartphone app developed

The Japan Dietetic Association, Kanagawa University of Human Services, Jumonji University, Hanoi Medical University and the Vietnam National Institute of Nutrition signed an agreement on academic exchanges in March 2014. JAPAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION



by the Fujitsu Research Institute to Cambodian factory workers for recording the details of the foods they consume at home and at work.

"App users can collect stamps for eating a variety of food and receive prizes accordingly. Because it uses blockchain technology, it can also collect big data over time," he said.

In both Indonesia and Cambodia, the NJPPP also used a method called Take 10 that encourages people to take 10 minutes off for exercise at least twice a day and eat from 10 specified food groups every day, excluding staples such as rice and bread. Yamaguchi said their efforts bore fruit in both countries, such as by increasing the intake of key nutrients through fortified rice and promoting changes in dietary habits. Productivity and motivation among the factory participants also improved.

The Japan Dietetic Association, as well as Yamaguchi, will each be holding side events during the N4G Summit.

Both Yamaguchi and Nakamura empha-

sized that it is important to provide assistance that is both sustainable and responsive to local needs.

"For example, even though Japanese food is considered to be healthy, it is wrong to just take it to other countries because they won't accept it as their diet," Yamaguchi said. "When starting a project, it is crucial to understand local food culture and their diet, so people will accept the change. To do that, it's also important to work with local people."

Nakamura also said providing money or food to a country suffering from poverty and undernutrition only saves it temporarily and does not represent a sustainable solution.

"What happens if the assistance is halted in five to 10 years? That is why Japan is providing education and trying to nurture human resources," he said. "If you want to save a country's health care, you need doctors. Likewise, if you want to make nutritional improvement in a country, you need to foster nutritional specialists."



In 2019, Nutrition Japan Public Private Platform redesigned the lunch menu for Japanese factories in the Kota Deltamas industrial complex. The revamp gave employees a better balance of fats, protein and energy, as well as more vegetables. NJPPP



Savory find leads battle to reduce sodium intake

Washoku, Japan's traditional dietary culture, was added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2013. Washoku has since grown rapidly into an international trend, and extensive research has been conducted into its health benefits.

The National Cancer Center Japan defines it as the "Japanese dietary pattern" and uses the eight-item Japanese Diet Index (JDI8), which scores the intake of rice, miso soup, seaweed, pickles, green and yellow vegetables, seafood, green tea and beef/pork, to investigate associations with mortality. Its studies have shown that groups with higher JDI8 scores have a 14% lower overall mortality rate and 11% lower mortality rates for both cardiovascular and heart disease.

The center also highlighted an inverse association between overall mortality and the intake of widely consumed fermented soy foods. Another intriguing finding is the possible enhancement of resistance to car-

diovascular disease by frequent *nattō* (fermented soy beans) intake.

These studies scientifically back the health benefits of washoku, despite some negative aspects, such as high sodium intake. According to the National Health and Nutrition Survey 2019, average daily sodium intake among Japanese is 10.9 grams for males and 9.3 grams for females, whereas the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's recommendation is 7.5 grams and 6.5 grams.

Umami demystified

Kikunae Ikeda (1864 to 1936), an academic peer of Ajinomoto founder Saburotsuke Suzuki, was a pioneer in the study of physical chemistry in Japan who was long concerned with the problems of the traditional Japanese diet. In 1908, he found that the savory flavor of kelp broth comes from the amino acid glutamate. In 1909, Suzuki launched a commercially produced gluta-

mate called Aji-no-moto umami seasoning. Ikeda's findings led to the discovery of umami, the fifth basic taste, unique from sweet, salty, sour and bitter.

While umami offers health benefits and can be found in many glutamate-rich foods, its purest form is MSG, a key component of Aji-no-moto umami seasoning. Although MSG has long been misunderstood in Western society, recent scientific findings validate its safety and health benefits. One study shows that MSG has two-thirds less sodium than table salt; when used as a partial replacement for salt, it can reduce sodium intake by up to 61% in home cooking and 50% in packaged foods, without compromising taste.

Delicious salt reduction

Ikeda hoped to help people enjoy better health with nutritious, umami-rich foods. Embracing his spirit, Ajinomoto aims to

unlock the power of amino acids, one of the body's fundamental building blocks, to address health issues associated with dietary habits and aging. One of the target outcomes of Ajinomoto's vision is to help extend the healthy life expectancy of 1 billion people by 2030. "As we offer products in over 130 countries, this target is now within reach," Executive Officer in charge of Sustainability and Communications Chika Morishima said.

To achieve this outcome, Ajinomoto positions "delicious salt reduction" as one of its key initiatives, launching the Smart Salt Project in July 2020 to encourage sodium reduction through the use of seasoning products. In this project, trained employees help introduce umami and other seasonings in daily cooking through videos and recipes via online media, raising consumers' awareness while addressing their concerns about low-sodium products, including taste and usability. To this end, the group has been providing nutrition education, including e-learning courses, to its employees worldwide to deepen their knowledge of healthy diets and pass it on to their communities.

Concerning the project's prospects, Morishima said, "In countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Brazil, the sales growth rate of low-sodium products exceeds that of regular products. People are becoming more aware of the need to reduce sodium intake, but some are more proactive than others. In that sense, we can do more to dispel the negative image of low-sodium products and introduce easier cooking methods and recipes."

The Ajinomoto Group currently offers a variety of low-sodium products in five countries outside Japan. In consideration of local food cultures, group companies work closely with local businesses and consumers to optimize products based on available ingredients, cooking styles and food prefer-



A scientific study suggests the traditional Japanese diet contributes to lowering mortality rates. GETTY IMAGES

ences. This close attention derives from their "Nutrition Without Compromise" policy, which commits to providing accessible, affordable products that can enhance the nutritional value of meals without detracting from taste or local food culture.

Acting on washoku boom

Washoku is popular around the world, as evidenced by the explosive growth in restaurants serving this cuisine in recent years. Words like umami and dashi have found their place in the English language, and interest in and knowledge of washoku have grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade.

To turn this trend into a dietary habit that can deliver the true health benefits of washoku, it will be crucial to promote broader knowledge of the cuisine, such as the benefits of consuming fermented soy foods, or the potential role that umami can play in controlling sodium intake. Japan's government and businesses view the

Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit as a valuable opportunity to share their knowledge and contribute to solving nutrition issues around the world.

With heart disease and strokes taking an estimated 3 million lives per year, the World Health Organization has warned against overconsumption of sodium and set the goal of reducing global sodium intake 30% by 2025. As the development of washoku and the major contributions of Japan's innovative food industry demonstrate, "You are what you eat" is no longer just proverbial advice. It is an essential mindset for individuals to achieve a healthy lifestyle and for the global community to thrive together.

Page 6 and 7 are sponsored by the government of Japan.



Washoku is gaining popularity around the world. GETTY IMAGES



Despite allegations based on no scientific evidence, MSG, when used properly, can actually contribute to developing a healthier diet and reducing sodium intake without compromising on flavor. GETTY IMAGES