

S'pore firm's new product may help

Felicia Choo

A home-grown company has created a product that adds fibre to food and may lower the glycaemic index (GI) of high carbohydrate meals, preventing them from causing the sudden spike in blood sugar levels that is so damaging to people with diabetes.

Food companies such as Han's, Lim Kee Food Manufacturing, Gardenia and Tan Seng Kee Foods are now testing the product by local food-tech start-up Alchemy Foodtech.

Alchemy said at the launch of its

new laboratory yesterday that the product lowers the GI without changing the taste, colour or texture of food.

GI is a figure indicating the relative ability of a carbohydrate to increase the level of glucose in the blood. Foods with a low GI value, which tend to be whole grains rather than refined carbohydrates, are slowly digested and absorbed, causing a slower and smaller rise in blood sugar levels.

Stable blood sugar levels reduce the risk of developing diabetic complications.

The product comes as 5ibrePlus,

a powder blend of natural plant fibres and extracts, and 5ibreGrain, the grain form of 5ibrePlus.

Alchemy spent 3½ years and \$800,000 developing them, said its co-founder and chief executive officer, Mr Alan Phua, 36.

He said research of the product conducted at the University of Sydney in 2016 and 2017 found that people who consumed white rice containing 9 per cent of 5ibreGrain had similar spikes in their blood sugar levels as when they ate brown rice, a whole grain.

Han's started testing 5ibreGrain in its fried rice and 5ibrePlus in its

diabetics avoid sugar spike from food

pastries a few months ago, and aims to launch the fried rice commercially in July, said Mr Simon Siah, its general manager.

He said if the trials were successful and consumers accepted the product, then Han's would consider adding them to other dishes such as noodles.

People who tried the dish said there was no difference in taste, he added.

Lim Kee Food Manufacturing also started trying 5ibrePlus in its char siew and red bean buns six months ago and plans to launch these products later this year, said

Mr Ang Khim Wee, the company's head of business development.

Both Han's and Lim Kee Food Manufacturing said the added ingredient would increase prices, and options without the added product would still be available.

Alchemy's new foodtech laboratory, at the Singapore Science Park, has biochemistry capabilities to conduct research on the digestion rates of carbohydrates and texture analysis of food.

It raised \$2.5 million in funds from an early round of funding.

"I see a lot of promise for this area (food technology and food innova-

tion) because the Singapore brand name is well-regarded and trusted around the world," Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry Chee Hong Tat said at the event.

Alchemy Foodtech was born of Mr Phua's desire to fight diabetes, as both his grandmothers had complications from the disease, and five of his mother's six siblings are diabetics.

About 440,000 people here have diabetes, and the number is estimated to grow to 1,000,000 by 2050.

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