Programme sets patients on the right track
Mind Your Body, The Straits Times (Thursday, 25 September 2008)

By June Cheong

Administrative operations executive Paul Koh spent $2,500 on a treadmill so he could exercise at home any time. He also bought a pair of running shoes for $175.

Mr Koh, 54, suffered a heart attack last July and underwent angioplasty and stenting at National University Hospital (NUH). Following his operation, he was put on NUH's cardiac rehabilitation programme for two months where he attended lectures on nutrition and monitored exercise sessions.

At 1.83m tall, Mr Koh shed 5kg from his 94kg frame. He said with a laugh: 'Anything that tastes good is bad for me. I had to give up food that contains coconut or palm oil, eggs, sugar and deep-fried stuff. Nasi lemak is out.'

Mr Koh is one of more than 400 heart patients who have benefited from NUH's cardiac rehabilitation programme since 2005.

The programme, which began in the late 1990s, currently sees between 25 and 35 patients every week who attend three to five sessions a week.

Other hospitals like the National Heart Centre Singapore also conduct similar programmes.

Patients learn about nutrition and exercise and receive counselling about the importance of making - and sticking to - lifestyle changes.

Dr Lim Soo Teik, head and senior consultant at the department of cardiology at National Heart Centre Singapore, said that an internal study found significant drops in the blood pressure levels of patients on its cardiac rehabilitation programme after three months.

A varied team, comprising occupational therapists, medical social workers, dietitians and pharmacists, is involved in tailoring the programme to patients' individual needs. Such programmes usually run for at least three months.

Ms Koay Saw Lan, head of dietetics and nutrition services at Singapore General Hospital, said: 'We teach them how to balance their energy and food intake, how to select the correct foods and how to read labels.'

Patients are also urged to eat more fruit and vegetables.
Asked if being on the cardiac rehabilitation programme was useful, Mr Koh said that going to the rehabilitation centre was encouraging.

'You become motivated when you see other people working out,' he said. 'Exercising alone is boring.'

"Anything that tastes good is bad for me. I had to give up food that contains coconut or palm oil, eggs, sugar and deep-fried stuff. Nasi lemak is out." - Mr Paul Koh, 54, who had a heart attack last July. He was on the National University Hospital's cardiac rehabilitation programme.