

**2023 JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION
GENERAL PAPER
Paper 2 Suggested Answers**

1. From paragraph 1, what was Markowitz's 'vocal opposition' (line 3) to Bloomberg's proposed ban on the sale of sugary drinks? Use your own words as far as possible. [3]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm overweight not because I drink litres of Coke, but frankly because I eat too much pasta, ...cheesecake (l. 5–7) Don't exercise as much as I should (l. 8) And my genes are working against me. I was an overweight kid and I'm an overweight adult (l. 8–9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (A) Markowitz argued that people are overweight not because of sugary drinks/ sugary drinks are just one of the many reasons people are overweight. [1] (B) He also pointed out that people are overweight because of the huge amounts of other unhealthy foods they eat, [1] (C) insufficient/lack of physical activity [1] (D) and biological reasons. [1] <p><i>Any 3 pts for 3 marks</i></p>
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2. In paragraph 2, what are the 'limits of state intervention' (line 11)? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

From the passage	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...governments can educate, inform, advocate and inspire, but should not be the final decision-maker when it comes down to what is best for the individual (l. 11–13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While governments can raise awareness about issues and encourage/motivate people to act, [1] <i>*either raise awareness or encourage needed</i> they should not ultimately determine what is ideal for each person. [1]

3. What does the question 'Should they even try?' in line 16 suggest about governments' attitudes regarding measures to promote healthy living? [1]

From the passage	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should they even try? (l. 16) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It suggests that governments are uncertain about the effectiveness of such measures [1] OR Governments are wondering if there is any point in taking any action to promote healthy living/ concerning themselves with promoting healthy living. [1]

4. Explain the author's use of the word 'even' in line 20. [2]

From the passage	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The United Nations has even devoted an entire meeting of its General Assembly to chronic disease, including those brought on by an unhealthy diet. (l. 20–22) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author uses 'even' to highlight how unhealthy eating/ the impact of an unhealthy diet has become so serious/ overwhelming/ widespread// is so difficult to tackle [1] that concerted effort by all countries is needed/ it has made its way to the agenda of such an important meeting/ drawn the attention of a global organisation. [1] <p><i>so difficult that the UN had to be involved = 0 (does not show the significance of the UN being involved)</i> <i>*answer must show that governments meet to discuss/ more than one country's effort</i></p>

5. In paragraph 4, what are three ways in which overeating may be harmful on a larger scale? Use your own words as far as possible. [3]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The more each person eats, particularly meat, the greater the pressure on food supplies. (l. 28–29) And as overweight children turn into fat adults, military strategists already worry about the health of future soldiers (l. 29–31) Employers gripe about productivity (l. 31) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (A) Overeating puts a strain on the amount of food available for the rest of the population, [1] (B) reduces the fitness level of soldiers which could weaken the military [1] <i>* some link between overeating and effectiveness of military required.</i> (C) and could weaken workers' performance at work, which could hurt companies' profits/ the economy. [1] <p><i>if there is no clear link to large scale e.g. answer just mentions soldiers' fitness or workers' performance = BOD</i></p>
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6. Explain one way in which the author uses language in lines 37–42 to emphasise that the anti-smoking campaign is the 'obvious model' in the fight against unhealthy eating. [1]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> obvious model is the battle against smoking, which at least in rich countries has been wildly successful (l. 37–38) smoking rates have dived (l. 42) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author used the word ‘wildly’ to convey how the anti-smoking campaign was a runaway success/ extremely successful. [1] OR The author used the word ‘dived’ to highlight how smoking rates plunged/ greatly declined after the campaign was rolled out. [1]
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7. Why is unhealthy eating ‘much harder to fight than smoking’ (line 43)? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

From the passage	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...the food industry finds it easier to resist regulation because it is three times the size of the tobacco industry. (l. 43–44) A cigarette has no place in a healthy lifestyle, but junk food, enjoyed in moderation, can still play a part in a varied diet (l. 44–46) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sheer size of the food industry compared to the tobacco industry/ The food industry is much larger than the tobacco industry which makes it more difficult to control/ keep in check/ police OR There are more ways for the food industry to not comply with measures/ laws because it is more powerful/ much larger than the tobacco industry [1] and junk food is not as clearly damaging as smoking// junk food, unlike smoking, is not unhealthy in small amounts (so there is less necessity/urgency/justification to ban it outright). [1]

8. In paragraph 7, what distinction does the author draw between the Japanese and American approaches to combatting obesity? [2]

From the passage	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japanese employers must provide waist measurements for all 40-74-year-olds. If they do not reduce the number of fat workers on their payroll, they may get fined (l. 48–50) some (American) companies give employees who are not overweight a discount on their health insurance (l. 52–53) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Japanese approach is a punitive one that takes to task those who do not lose weight while the American approach rewards people who/ incentivises people to lose weight/ maintain a healthy weight.

10. Suggest one reason why the author mentions the studies in the final paragraph. [1]

From the passage	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...if it were clear which ones are effective (l. 87) • But for now governments will continue to experiment to see what works. (l. 91) • ...new studies to gauge the effect of different policies (l. 90) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author does so to highlight/ point out/ emphasise that the effectiveness of policies to reduce unhealthy food consumption is still undetermined/ being researched. [1] OR • The author does so to highlight that research on the effectiveness of the various healthy eating policies is inconclusive. [1] OR • The author does so to point out that governments are still studying the impact of various policies in curbing unhealthy eating. [1]

9. Using material from paragraphs 8 to 11 only (lines 54–86), summarise what the author has to say about ways to combat unhealthy eating and the challenges faced.

Write your summary in no more than 120 words, not counting the opening words which are printed below. Use your own words as far as possible.

One way to combat unhealthy eating is...

[Measure 1] • such as punishing the obese for their excessive girth (l. 54–55)	A1	To implement (financially) punitive measures
[Challenge 1] • a crudely designed penalty will do little to change behaviour (l. 55–56)	A2	which were found to be ineffective as they lacked subtlety/ were too blunt/ insufficiently customised
• strict penalties assume that obesity is due to lack of willpower (l. 57)	A3	by wrongly presuming that obesity is a result of poor discipline/ a lack of determination/ poor control,
• it has as much to do with biology (l. 58)	A4	when it also involves genetic/ physiological
• and the fact that socio-economic conditions can be an obstacle to healthy eating (l. 58–59)	A5	and financial factors.
[Challenge 2] • Governments have to find policies that are strong enough to work well (l. 60)	B1	It is difficult for governments to be firm/ forceful/ aggressive enough
• but subtle enough not to get up people's noses . (l. 60–61)	B2	yet not overly intrusive.
[Measure 2] • What works best is frequent prompts , not once-a-year punishment. (l. 56)	B3	Thus, governments now try issuing regular reminders,
• nudge citizens into healthy behaviour (l. 61–62)	B4	and (subtly) encouraging citizens to take more care of their health/ have a

		proper diet <i>push = 0</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by making it easier than the alternative. (l. 62) 	B5	by removing barriers to healthy eating/ healthy living// making healthy eating/ healthy living convenient/ accessible/ less challenging/ less difficult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The idea is to provide small impulses so that health becomes the obvious choice. (l. 67–68) 	B6	and making it more logical to choose healthy options/ making healthy options more prominent.
[Measure 3] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing them with more information (l. 70) 	C1	Governments furnish/ supply people with nutritional data about their food// make facts regarding the food they eat more accessible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> require chain restaurants to list the number of calories per serving (l. 71) menu labelling (l. 72–73) 	C2	by mandating/ making compulsory the display of nutritional facts/ such data.
[Challenge 3] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> only 15% of customers used New York's calorie information (l. 73–74) 	C3	However, few diners consider such data in their food choices/ such data is under-utilised.
[Measure 4] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower consumption of junk food (l. 76) make it more expensive. (l. 77) 	D1	Governments have also tried to curb demand for snacks/ reduce snacking by making snacks more costly
[Measure 4a] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removing corn subsidies is one way to raise prices (l. 77) 	D2	through the elimination/ getting rid of/ taking away corn subsidies// raising the cost of production.
[Challenge 4a] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> it would likely only result in a small dip in the production and consumption of corn syrup (l. 78) 	D3	However, this might only lead to a slight/ insignificant/ negligible drop in the use of corn syrup.
[Measure 4b] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consequently, a more popular measure is to impose taxes (l. 79) 	D4	So more governments are implementing/ levying/ enforcing taxes to raise prices
[Challenge 4b] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> such measures have been ill-conceived (l. 81–82) 	D5	but these are often poorly planned/ not well thought through <i>poorly executed/ badly done = 0</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> or too timid (l. 82) To have much effect, taxes of this kind 	D6	and not large/ severe/ heavy enough.

must be levied at 20% or higher (l. 82–83)		
• such taxes are easily circumvented . (l. 84)	D7	Furthermore, they are not difficult to get around/ can be avoided/ evaded/ contain loopholes
• The fat tax had resulted in fatty shopping sprees abroad . (l. 85–86)	D8	because people can buy unhealthy/ junk food overseas.

Total: 22 points

Mark scheme

1 point	1 mark	6–7 points	4 marks	11–12 points	7 marks
2–3 points	2 marks	8 points	5 marks	≥ 13 points	8 marks
4–5 points	3 marks	9–10 points	6 marks		

11. In the passage, the author highlights the challenges governments face in combatting unhealthy eating.

How far do you agree with the author's observations? Relate your arguments to your own experience and that of your society. [10]

QUESTION ANALYSIS

the challenges governments face in combatting unhealthy eating

- The difficulties or struggles that governments encounter when trying to get people to eat more healthily.

How far do you agree with the author's observations?

- **how far** ☐ The degree of your agreement/ disagreement should be clearly stated, using appropriate qualifiers.
- Do not blindly agree or disagree with the author's observations of the challenges governments face in combatting unhealthy eating.

Relate your arguments to your own experience and that of your society

- You must identify your society and contextualise your answer in your society, right from the start.
- if you do mention aspects of your own experience, it must be in relation to the experience of Singaporeans. Avoid telling the examiner your life story or personal stories about your eating habits.
- All aspects of the AQ answer must relate to your society ☐ do not waste time/ space discussing issues to do with other countries or in a generic manner.
- Do not refer vaguely to 'people' ☐ instead of 'people', use 'Singaporeans', 'Malaysians', 'Chinese' (or other relevant nationalities) **throughout the answer**.
- Do not merely describe what is happening in your society. Consider and evaluate the following, where relevant to the AQ.
 - ☐ **Provide clear reasons** and evaluation to support how relevant the author's observations are to your society.

- Evaluate how valid the author's observations of the challenges governments face are in your society. Examine the mindsets, values, principles, culture, circumstances, etc. that affect the actions of the government and people in your society regarding unhealthy eating.

USING THE SUGGESTED APPROACH WISELY

- You will notice that the suggested approach below provides many examples and different angles of evaluation/ argument.
- In the examination, you are not expected to write an AQ response at such length. You are reasonably expected to provide some perceptive evaluation/ argument and at least one well-evaluated example per body paragraph.
- However, you should still carefully examine the various angles of evaluation/ argument presented below to see how the author's observations can be evaluated in the context of Singapore.
- The numerous examples are there to show you that examples are in abundance and not so difficult to cite. You should also familiarise yourself with these examples, because they can be used in a different context, by looking at them from a different angle.

SUGGESTED APPROACH

- R:** The extent to which you agree with the author's observations of the challenges governments face in combatting unhealthy eating.
- OB1–5:** Choose two observations for discussion. State your chosen observation clearly with paragraph/ line reference at the start of each body paragraph.
- EX, EV:** Explaining, developing and evaluating your arguments with reference to yourself and your own society, making the link clear to OB and R.
- EG:** Supporting ideas with relevant examples from your society, and making the link from the examples to OB, EX, EV and R.

**** for the suggested answer below, 'your society' = Singapore**

INTRODUCTION

- My society, Singapore, is internationally renowned as a food paradise. Delicious local dishes like chicken rice, laksa, nasi lemak and char kway teow have captured the imagination of both locals and foreigners alike.
- Unfortunately, our beloved local cuisine, amongst other factors, has also arguably contributed to a rising obesity rate in Singapore, causing the government much concern as they grapple with how to get Singaporeans to eat more healthily.
- Thus, while there are some encouraging signs of healthier eating in recent years, I agree for the most part with the challenges faced by governments in combatting unhealthy eating as raised by the author, in the context of my society.

OBSERVATION 1

The author observes that one challenge faced by governments in combatting unhealthy eating is that there is a limit to how far governments can interfere in people's eating habits (para 2), as governments can educate, inform, advocate and inspire, but might not be the final decision-maker on individuals' choice of food.

- **I largely agree with the author.** Even the Singapore government, which is widely seen as a paternalistic one that often interferes in various aspects of people's lives,

faces a limit as to how far it can control people's eating habits. Given that eating is such a deeply personal choice, it would be regarded as too draconian and outrageously intrusive for the government to dictate every individual's diet.

- Indeed, government healthy eating campaigns have been a mainstay in Singapore since the 1970s. These reflect the government's forward-planning approach to governance, to encourage Singaporeans to eat more healthily to reduce the health burden on the state. The campaigns include the Better Food for Better Health campaign in 1975, Nutrition Week in 1989, the Healthy Diet Pyramid and the Trim and Fit (TAF) scheme, the My Healthy Plate campaign introduced in 2014 and the War on Diabetes in 2016.
- These campaigns adopted a mix of tactics, from educating Singaporeans on the appropriate food groups to consume, to encouraging them to be choosier about the food they eat, reflecting the range of different psychological tactics used to get Singaporeans to change their food choices. Ultimately though, the government is also cognisant that it cannot control what Singaporeans actually consume, and it is up to Singaporeans to make the final decision on what to eat.
- Furthermore, eating is a national pastime and so much a part of Singapore culture that it is often difficult to eat healthily when social conventions demand that food be enjoyed. In Singapore, festive occasions like Christmas and the respective ethnic new years are usually celebrated with rich and lavish meals that go against all exhortations of healthy diets. In the workplace, it would be churlish to reject lunch invitations and promotion treats centred around a decadent meal. At school, enjoying unhealthy snacks like bubble tea are part and parcel of bonding with friends. All these frequent food-based social interactions make the socialisation over the eating much more important than the health consequences of the eating, so government exhortations for healthy eating are unsurprisingly ignored.
- On a daily basis, eating healthily may also be challenging for Singaporeans to make, as most working adults are so busy that they do not have time to cook their own meals, but rely on convenient options like hawker fare or fast food, which tend to be unhealthy.
- **While the government is not giving up in its efforts to guide Singaporeans' eating habits and the campaigns have made some headway to improving people's food choices, the results leave much to be desired.**
- According to the Health Promotion Board's latest nutrition survey in 2018, there has been an improvement in Singaporeans' food choices. Many Singaporeans are now consuming more fruits and vegetables, as well as substituting saturated fats with unsaturated ones. They were also consuming fewer calories, dropping from 2,600kcal in 2010 to 2,470kcal in 2018, but this is only a 5 per cent decline.
- On other counts, Singaporeans are still consuming a high amount of sugar and salt. Their total sugar intake increased to 60g in 2018, from 59g in 2010, and for salt intake, 90 per cent of Singaporeans exceeded the recommended amount of 5g per day, with the average daily salt intake in 2018 at 9g.
- **These figures highlight the uphill challenge faced by the government in combatting unhealthy eating as individuals' food choices cannot be fully controlled by the government.**

OBSERVATION 2

The author points out that another challenge faced by governments in combatting unhealthy eating is that the food industry is difficult for governments to regulate due to its sheer size (para 6).

- **Even in tiny Singapore, the food industry is huge, and this poses a great challenge to the government.** Singapore being a food paradise, food retailers can

be found everywhere, from grocers in wet markets and supermarkets, to dining places like hawker centres, food courts and restaurants. There are also plenty of outlets selling snacks that can be eaten on the go, from the ubiquitous bubble tea shops to fried finger foods like Old Chang Kee stalls. Furthermore, behind the scenes, there are countless industrial plants and companies making up the entire food manufacturing process.

- Not only is the size of the food industry a challenge, the range and diversity of the industry itself makes it extremely difficult for the government to fully regulate the industry to encourage healthy eating. This is because regulations of one type of food retailer do not automatically apply to other parts of the industry which sell foods in different forms, or who may adapt quickly to present themselves as 'healthy' alternatives even if they might not truly be so. While there may be some guidelines on food options in food retailers on premises like school canteens and workplaces, it is practically impossible for the government to control what all food retailers sell.
- For example, since end-2021, the government has required pre-packaged drink manufacturers to include Nutri-Grade labels for pre-packaged drinks to indicate the fat and sugar content of the drinks. However, a new nutrition labelling scheme for freshly made beverages, such as bubble tea and smoothies will only be introduced in end-2023. This shows how the diversity of the food industry makes it impossible for the government to impose blanket regulations, as there is no one-size-fits-all solution.
- Even food fads like 'coconut shakes', which are touted by their sellers as a healthier alternative to bubble tea because of the fruit component, are not truly so. This is because vanilla or coconut ice-cream is usually a key ingredient in such shakes, contributing significantly to its sugar and fat levels.
- **However, while the government may not have an iron grip on the food industry, the very fact that some food retailers are trying to present 'healthier' alternatives is a win in itself.**
- For example, more food retailers have introduced healthy food options. Bubble tea shops have indicated that they are looking to tweak the recipes of their drinks with high levels of sugar and saturated fats, so that the drinks do not face an advertising ban. Even fast-food chains like McDonald's have introduced healthy options like corn, salad and wraps to cater to the health conscious.
- Also, as consumers become more health conscious, the combination of other incentives to eat healthily, coupled with the increase in variety of healthy options provided by the food industry, may go some way to helping Singaporeans develop more healthy eating habits. As more consumers demand healthier options, these could also pressure the food industry to shift towards providing even more healthy options.
- **As such, while the government currently faces huge challenges posed by the sheer size of the food industry in combatting unhealthy eating, this challenge may fade over time as consumers themselves join in to force the industry to make changes.**

OBSERVATION 3

The author argues that governments struggle to justify any strong measures against unhealthy food because it is not really detrimental to health if consumed in moderation (l. 45–46).

- There is much resemblance to the Singapore context and I strongly agree with this observation as this is a fairly huge obstacle that the government faces in getting Singaporeans to eat healthily.

- A large part of Singapore's national efforts to promote healthy eating relies on campaigns that encourage Singaporeans to consume unhealthy food in moderation, rather than strong measures that ban or tax unhealthy food.
- These include the My Healthy Plate tool and the Healthier Choice symbol to encourage the consumption of healthier options rather than less healthy ones, but these have not made much of an impact on Singaporeans' diets.
- As much as Singapore's health authorities might want to, it is certainly difficult to go against conventional wisdom and even global consensus of health experts that junk food in moderation is not exactly a risk to one's health.
- Strong measures to curb unhealthy eating would not have the backing of generally acknowledged health research findings regarding moderation. Singaporeans are likely to balk at such draconian measures, making it even harder to even crack the surface of the battle of the Singaporean bulge.
- In more recent times, there certainly have been stronger measures implemented by the Ministry of Health, such as the 2021 ban on partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs), the main source of artificial trans fats, as an ingredient in all foods sold in Singapore. However, even this stronger measure is backed by the World Health Organisation's call for the world to eliminate industrially-produced trans fats by 2023, as it has no known benefit and only severe health risks.
- Even the recent mandatory labelling of pre-packed beverages with a very high level of sugar and saturated fat content in 2022 and similar freshly prepared beverages by end 2023 with the Nutri-Grade mark, and a ban on advertisements of beverages with a very high sugar content on all local mass media platforms stopped short of curtailing the consumption of these beverages. It would be difficult to justify such a ban when the occasional consumption of such beverages does little harm to an otherwise healthy diet. In fact, the labelling system aims to encourage Singaporeans to gravitate towards healthier beverages, many of which still have some sugar.
- Despite much discussion and debate over the last few years, Singapore has not implemented a sugar tax. Health Minister Ong Ye Kung explained that sugar is commonly consumed by many people and a sugar tax would add on to the costs of food and beverages and the equity of such a tax is difficult to ensure between artificially added and naturally occurring sugar in food and beverages.
- These reasons point to the fact that some consumption of sugar is not at odds with a generally healthy diet. In fact, the human body does need some glucose for brain functions and as fuel, and some salt to maintain a balance of body fluids and keep muscles and nerves running smoothly.
- **Clearly, it is difficult for the Singapore government to justify and implement even stronger measures against unhealthy food when evidence shows that eating less healthy food in moderation does not harm one's health.**

OBSERVATION 4

The author asserts that governments also struggle to encourage people to eat healthily because it can be difficult to address the socio-economic obstacles to healthy eating (I. 58–59).

- **I do agree that this is quite the case in Singapore as the cost of eating more healthily is an impediment to enabling lower income Singaporeans to adopt a healthier diet.**
- With more than 90% of Singapore's food imported, food in general is costlier. Furthermore, due to limited farmland, high labour costs and energy prices soaring, local vegetables in the few high-tech urban farms that we have cost more to grow and tend to be priced about 30 per cent higher than imported greens.

- Healthy food in Singapore also tends to be more expensive, while the less healthy options are cheaper. As such, to consistently eat more healthily takes a toll on the finances of the lower income Singaporeans, especially when affordable unhealthy options might be more accessible and convenient than healthier food, whether cooked at home or bought ready-to-eat.
- A 2018 study of low-income Singaporeans conducted by the Singapore Management University (SMU) found that nearly 20 per cent reported severe food insecurity, with many resorting to the typical diet of a person who is food insecure – processed meals high in carbohydrates and sodium, and low on nutritional value, putting them at higher risk of obesity, diabetes, cardiac disease, and other chronic illnesses.
- Even measures to help lower income Singaporeans better afford food do not quite address the nutritional content of the food. For example, all 374 HDB rental coffee shops, or roughly half of all eating houses situated in HDB estates, are required to provide budget meal options by 2026. The aim is to keep food affordable in the heartland, rather than make healthier food affordable.
- **Some measures have been implemented to provide lower income Singaporeans with healthier food supplies though.** In a follow-up survey in 2021, SMU found that about one-fifth of lower-income households studied were able to improve their access to healthy and regular meals daily over the past two years, partly due to monetary aid.
- In 2022, Cold Storage supermarket expanded its collaboration with The Food Bank Singapore to provide needy families with food, to include fresh produce, enabling more lower income Singaporeans to have access to healthier food like fresh fruit and vegetables rather than have to turn to junk food.
- **However, such measures have not made healthier food options any cheaper, and these forms of aid might not be sustainable in the long run.** Furthermore, the root causes of poverty and rising costs of living in Singapore are complex and it would take more than financial aid and food supplies to make healthy eating more affordable for lower-income Singaporeans.
- **There is some realisation that more targeted measures are needed to make healthier food options more affordable for Singaporeans, particularly those from lower income groups.**
- In 2016, supermarket chain NTUC FairPrice launched FairPrice Shop, located near the homes of lower-income families, to offer a more affordable range of products, including a new FairPrice housebrand, Value Fresh. The 34 fresh vegetable products in this range are 5 per cent to 10 per cent cheaper than the chain's existing Pasar range of housebrand produce.
- **This is indeed a step forward in making healthier food more affordable for poorer Singaporeans, but there is still a long way before the socio-economic obstacles to healthy eating in Singapore can be overcome.**

OBSERVATION 5

The author points out that governments find it a challenge to get people to eat healthily because most people do not take the nutritional information provided into consideration when consuming their food (para 10).

- **This is also the case in my society, Singapore.** For many years now, the government has been trying to nudge Singaporeans towards healthier eating habits through the provision of information on the nutrition levels of food, their ingredients as well as general food-related health recommendations. The government rolled out the Nutrition Labelling Programme back in 1998, with its implementation taking place in different phases over the years, encompassing the development of the nutrition information panel, the implementation of the Healthier Choice symbol, and the

Nutri-Grade A to D labels, amongst other features. Such information is widely seen today on the packaging of products ranging from fresh meat and fruit to packaged snacks and drinks. The government has even gone so far as to stipulate that nutrition labels will be mandatory by the end of 2023 for freshly prepared drinks that contain higher levels of sugar and fat.

- That the government is constantly tweaking its labelling recommendations and stipulations suggests that the provision of such information to discourage unhealthy eating has so far been of limited efficacy in Singapore. This is hardly surprising given that food plays such a fundamental role in Singaporean culture, and that unhealthy food occupies a prime position in the pantheon of local food. Much of this local food is prepared and consumed in hawker centres, where it is practically impossible to implement any sort of meaningful labelling policy apart from recommendations like ‘ask for less gravy’ and ‘ask for more vegetables’. Besides, tastiness, rather than nutritional value, reigns supreme for most Singaporeans when they search out their next meal – in online debates and articles about the best laksa or nasi lemak, nutritional value is most certainly not one of the considered criteria.
- What makes it especially challenging is that most Singaporeans do in fact know about the unhealthy nature of much of the food we consume, yet we continue to indulge for reasons that are much more complex than any labelling policy can address. At the end of a long, tiring and stressful workday, no amount of doomsday labelling is going to get between a Singaporean and his catharsis-inducing plate of char kway teow. Many Singaporeans also use McDonald’s’ health information-laden tray liners more to soak up the grease from their oily french fries than as reading material. Time-starved Singaporeans, too, are not going to spend precious minutes poring over the fine print on food labels as they rush up and down the crowded aisles of their neighbourhood Giant or NTUC.
- **Still, it must be acknowledged that a small but increasing number of Singaporeans are more concerned about eating healthily**, perhaps a result of greater awareness of the perils on unhealthy eating and the spread of healthy eating trends. A 2022 Etiqua survey of Singaporeans’ nutritional literacy revealed that an increasing number of Singaporeans, especially those in their twenties and thirties, do read nutritional information when purchasing food.
- **Despite this encouraging trend, the fact remains that most Singaporeans do not really pay attention to nutritional information, and the government will continue to face an uphill task to get Singaporeans to do so and act on the information.**

OBSERVATION 6

The author observes in paragraph 11 that making unhealthy food more expensive may not work as a strategy to curb unhealthy eating because there are still ways to circumvent any price increase.

- This is also reflective of my society, Singapore. The Singapore government has toyed with the idea of imposing a sugar tax, or a tax on sugary drinks, in line with what many other countries have done. The implementation of such a tax has been debated in parliament, though the conclusion was that a sugar tax would not be equitable and would also raise the already high cost of living here.
- After all, sugar is found in many of the freshly prepared drinks that are popular amongst Singaporeans such as sugarcane juice, ‘teh’ (tea) and even the pearls in bubble tea. Such drinks, unlike pre-packaged drinks, are difficult to tax, so even if pre-packaged sweet drinks were to be taxed, there would be a whole range of affordable, freshly prepared options for Singaporeans to satisfy their sweet cravings.

- Aside from issues of practicality, strategies to raise the prices of unhealthy food would also likely be ineffective in reducing Singaporeans' consumption of such food, since Singaporeans' general affluence would enable most of them to afford slight increases in price. A few cents' price increase is quite unlikely to dissuade Singaporeans from buying themselves a cup of Koi or Chicha San Chen bubble tea when the satisfaction of imbibing all that creamy, sugary, pearl-studded liquid is priceless.
- Finally, with cheap and delicious Malaysian food just a short drive away via the two causeways linking Singapore and Malaysia, foodie Singaporeans could literally turn their backs on any hypothetical increase in the prices of unhealthy food and head north to indulge at a fraction of the price. With the strong Singapore Dollar and the wealth of Malaysian food that many Singaporeans feel is superior to local cuisine, Singaporeans are already heading in droves across the causeway each weekend to get their fill of roti canai, teh tarik, and buttery banana cake from Hiap Joo Bakery. Any attempt to raise food prices here would likely drive more Singaporeans northward.
- **Of course, Singaporeans are also known as a rather cost-conscious bunch, so there may be those who will respond favourably to an increase in the prices of unhealthy food so as to keep expenditure low in the face of an already rising cost of living.** However, healthier food options in Singapore are not exactly cheap and may not be affordable to all Singaporeans. It is not uncommon to see a premium charged for organic produce and healthier snacks like nuts and berries. Besides, with the gradual rise of the Goods and Services Tax and cost of living in general, it is understandable that the government may be unwilling to impose further price hikes on food to avoid fueling politically inconvenient discontent amongst Singaporeans.
- **Thus, any increase in the prices of unhealthy food in Singapore would not be viable if there are few affordable healthier alternatives, since this would unfairly penalise Singaporeans who are less well-off, and drive more Singaporeans to explore ways and means to get around these price increases.**

CONCLUSION

- While there have been encouraging steps made by both the government and Singaporeans in the fight against unhealthy eating, the battle of the Singaporean bulge remains an uphill one.
- Nevertheless, this battle is one worth fighting, and every little calorie shaved off a Singaporean's diet is a bullet fired in the right direction.