

## Thin is in for Singapore youth

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SINGAPORE – Fauzi Rassull is a slim 20-year-old blogger, popular among Singapore's fashionable youngsters, who flaunts his 1.73-metre (5-foot 8-inch), 60-kilogram (132-pound) frame in glamour shots splashed on his sites.



Fauzi Rassull (front) with his friends pose for photographs in Singapore -  
Photo: AFP

Followers share tips on eating and Fauzi himself swears by his regimen of two meals a day consisting of bread, instant noodles and salad.

Thanks in part to anti-fat advocates like Fauzi, thin is in among Singapore teens and young adults, but experts warn that the fad is behind a worrying spike in the number

of people developing eating disorders.

"I don't see myself as thin, I don't think I'm thin now," he insisted, saying he was aiming to cut his weight down to 53 kilograms.

Fauzi's dream weight would put him below the healthy range of the Body Mass Index (BMI) system used in many countries to measure fat.

At that weight, Fauzi, who does not hold a regular job and sells ads on his blog, would be risking "nutritional deficiency diseases and osteoporosis" based on the BMI scale of the Singapore Health Promotion Board, a government agency.

Fauzi, whose blog "The Male Bitch" was voted Singapore's most popular blog for four consecutive weeks in 2009, denies he is encouraging anorexia, which afflicts many Asian youngsters.

"I just want to be skinny and people misinterpret skinny and anorexic," he said, referring to hate mail he had been receiving from outraged people accusing him of promoting the eating disorder.

Medical studies show anorexia has become an endemic problem in Asian countries, whether in industrial powerhouses such as Japan and South Korea or emerging economies like India.

Singapore is no exception, with the Eating Disorders Programme of the Singapore General Hospital reporting five new cases a month. Many other cases are handled by private clinics.

Singapore has a resident population of just 3.64 million, of whom 13.4 percent belong to the 15 to 24 age category, the demographic most susceptible to the disorder, according to psychiatrist Ken Ung.

"I think that the eating disorders are sort of a novelty, curiosity, so they are fairly popular to young people," said Ung, who has studied anorexia for years.

He disapproves of websites and blogs such as Fauzi's due to their influence among the young.

"These sites should be taken down, definitely it is harmful to that small vulnerable minority that will be influenced," he said.

Popular social networking site Facebook apparently shared the same sentiments. Fauzi said his 900-strong Facebook group -- "Get Thin or Die Trying" -- saw a spike in membership before it was taken down by site administrators in April this year.

He was also issued a warning and refused permission to start a new Facebook group after repeated attempts.

In a copy of the warning sent to Fauzi, Facebook said the site does not allow "groups that are hateful, threatening or obscene."

But Fauzi, who is also the creator of "The Thinspo Club" on Facebook's rival social networking site Friendster, said all he was trying to do was gather like-minded individuals to share slimming tips.

"I just want Singaporeans to lead a healthy lifestyle as well," he said. Lee Huei Yen, the director of the Eating Disorders Programme, was sceptical of Fauzi's diet.

"The diet does not sound healthy and balanced and this person may possibly have an eating disorder," she said.

A freelance model, Braberry Paula Elizabeth, also expressed concern over Fauzi's slimming obsession.

"To me he's really slim, but I don't know why he wants to be thinner," said the svelte 19-year-old contestant in a beauty competition organised by bikini magazine FHM Singapore.

"Slimming is one thing, but there's a limit to everything," she said. Fauzi brushes aside such concerns and is single-mindedly pursuing his dream of being as fashionably thin as American socialite Paris Hilton.

"She's my idol, she's very pretty, that's why I want to go to the extent of trying to be as thin as possible," he gushed.

"It's all about glamour."

By Philip Lim (AFP)

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