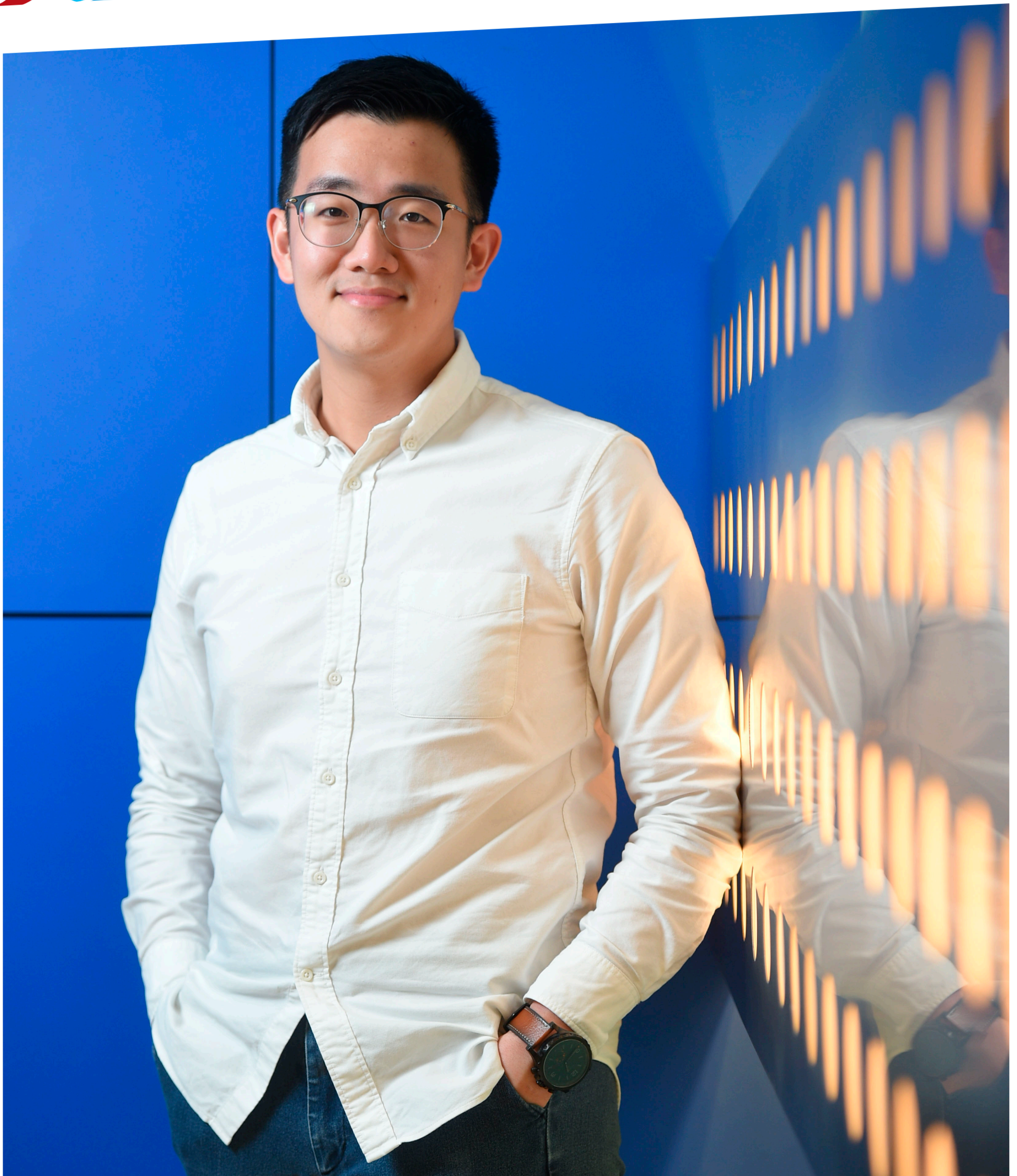


*IT'S IN YOUR* ADVANX-ING YOUR HEALTH WITH YONG WEI SHIAN AND  
CHEW YEN PING



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If you're going to be talking about extremely scientific and technical topics such as DNA and health tech, you could do a lot worse than with Yong Wei Shian and Chew Yen Ping, co-founders of Advanx Health.

I meet with the two in their cosy office space in KiasuLab at Damansara Utama. They greet me with smiles, firm handshakes, and easy-going attitudes that immediately puts one at ease – and before you know it, we're completely engrossed in one of the most science-laden conversations I've had to date.

"Specific genes give you your brown eyes and black hair colour. Genes also determine the way your body takes in vitamins, how it responds to medicines, and put you at higher risk to certain diseases and health risks," Yen Ping tells me. The Product and Tech Lead takes a moment to shift into a more comfortable position, and then goes on explaining that this is why certain medical concerns, such as familial hypercholesterolemia – or, elevated cholesterol levels in layman's terms – is inherited. On that, DNA testing generally works by sorting through your genetic variants and pinpointing those that, in the current state of science and technology, carry significant relevance about your health.

Let's put it this way: if we know our risks for certain diseases, we'll know exactly what to look out for when we go for blood tests or screenings. "We can then better monitor our health," says Wei Shian with a smile. He looks over the rim of his glasses, pausing for a moment so that I get the significance in what he has just said. "DNA testing can help give you that information. Yes, blood tests and health checkups are able to do that too, but they only tell you about the present – DNA testing, on the other hand, is also able to tell you about what's going to happen in the future."

And this lies as the core of the Malaysian genetics technology company – to empower people with valuable and unique information regarding their DNA so that they can take charge of their current and future health.

The road to discovering yourself with Advanx

Health is fairly simple: once you've decided to have yourself tested, you get a saliva collection kit from them either via mail or through one of their authorised distributors, deposit some of your saliva into the provided test tube, send the kit back to them, and then wait for about a month to get back a report that details up to 40 comprehensive insights into your predispositions for health risks, nutrition traits, fitness traits as well as other inner potentials.

Now, this is just what happens from your end – things are much more complex when your DNA gets to the Advanx Health headquarters. These samples would be sent to the selected facilities around Malaysia, where trained professionals take anywhere from 10 days to a month to have all the relevant information extracted from your DNA. Once that is done, Advanx Health then works with partner health centres and universities to analyse the data against scientific papers, to come up with a list of ideal diet, fitness and lifestyle advice based on your genes: "We can even connect you with professionals for further guidance," smiles Yen Ping.

## ADVANCING ADVANX HEALTH

"It's actually quite random," laughs Wei Shian when asked about their company's name. "We were searching for a domain name that can be found in Godaddy, a web host and domain registrar. It was decided that the second word had to be 'health' so then we started to play around with words. Suddenly, the team came up with 'Advancing Healthcare,' so we thought okay, let's try out Advance Health." But the name was obviously not available as a domain name in Godaddy, which prompted them to change 'ce' into 'x.' "Because 'x' looks like a pair of chromosome and it relates to our core activities which is DNA," explains Wei Shian with a grin while exchanging knowing glances with his co-founder.

And on how the idea of starting a DNA testing business came about, the two – who crossed paths at Next Academy – attribute it to another mission of theirs: to spread awareness that we are all unique; that your body simply is not meant to accommodate cookie-cutter diets



and trendy workouts. "We want people to realise that something that works for someone won't necessarily work for another," shares Wei Shian. With backgrounds in the pharmaceutical industry, the co-founders realised that people hardly understood their own bodies, which is why they didn't understand how best to keep themselves healthy. "Some people would find more benefits while engaging in strength training exercises, while others can get more from cardio. That's just the way it is." So, in 2017, Wei Shian and Yen Ping decided to start the company in an attempt to close the gap between understanding your own body and having workout and health routines that are specifically catered to your unique self.

"It is also our plan to create a database of Southeast Asia users," continues Yen Ping with a glint in her eyes. The fact of the matter is that most established DNA data banks is made of higher concentrations of Caucasian gene samples, making it so that most medical solutions created today follow guidelines that suit those genes. "In the long run, as Advanx

Health and the number of people who get tested continue to grow, we would be able to create our own guidelines – that are tailored to our region – when it comes to medical matters," shares Wei Shian enthusiastically, "we want to work with medical parties to make this happen – instead of using guidelines catered by and for Caucasian users, imagine if we built and used a database that just suited Malaysians." It's obvious that he is the kind of guy who harbours big dreams, and who is particularly driven to achieve them. It is as if he takes a special pleasure in checking them off – which is actually a refreshing trait to witness.

I squeeze in one last question to the duo – what's next? "We want to grow the company to be able to provide more genetic tests for the mass market, and hence provide more personalised solution for our customers," answers Wei Shian in a heartbeat. If you should ever need that extra nudge in the right direction to make healthier life choices, know that you can count on him, Yen Ping and Advanx Health to do the job.

