Lefties have their day

International Left Handers' Day was celebrated recently, and these days, stores sell items tailored for southpaws

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Hands up, left-handers. In a room with 10 people in it, at least one is likely to be a 'southpaw', the affectionate moniker for such folk.

In Singapore, online store Simply Lefty sells items like kitchen utensils, tools and stationery designed for left-handers.

There's also International Left Handers' Day, celebrated nine days ago, on Aug 13.

Southpaw Edmund Sim, 27, and some left-handed friends went out for dinner and drinks that night. "We wanted to celebrate the event," said Mr Sim, who is the director of Simply Lefty.

Available statistics indicate that, worldwide, left-handers make up between 8 per cent and 12 per cent of the population, putting the number of lefties here at around 500,000.

That's not too small for a niche market. Besides Mr Sim's store, lefties can find left-handed guitars and golf clubs, among other goods, in some online and brick-and-mortar shops.

"We did a market survey here and realised left-handers are under-served," explained Mr Sim, on his year-old venture. He also hopes to get more left-handers to meet.

"We must dispel this notion that we are inferior. We have to be comfortable being ourselves," he said.

Many southpaws have, in fact, adapted to products for right-handers, or engaged in sports like bowling, which may be slightly awkward for them.

Doctors The Sunday Times spoke to said that, with time and training, lefties do adapt to such products.

Consultant psychiatrist Brian Yeo said most left-handed people can be trained from a young age to handle such items even if there may be some awkwardness, such as when handling bowling balls.

"It will be difficult to make the switch initially. But mostly, being left-handed does not affect day-to-day living and most adjust," said Dr Yeo.

Still, he agreed that customised products are best.

And parents these days are less insistent on making their left-handed children switch.

This was not the case 20 years ago, Dr Yeo said. Then, society was not as liberal and still held the view that left-handers were abnormal.

Catering to left-handers

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Does not affect daily life

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Suitable for everyone

"All our seminar and study rooms have tables that can be used by all users, left-handers or right-handers. The flip-up writing tops on the chairs of our auditoriums are also suitable for all users." A spokesman for Singapore Management University

After all, the word "left" in French is "gauche", which means clumsy or awkward.

Mr Erwin Nah, 26, a producer, recalled his mother asking him to write using his right hand. But he persisted in using his left hand.

Still, he has since learnt to use his right hand for certain activities, such as range shooting while doing his national service in the police force.

Psychiatrists said that, to some extent, lefties may be more creative than right-handers. This is because their right brain, which is responsible for creativity and emotions, is more dominant.

But people generally need both sides of the brain for most functions.

It seems that southpaws are not discriminated against when it comes to jobs as well.

"In our casino, we hire both right and left-handed dealers and ensure that they are well trained in their respective games," said a spokesman for Marina Bay Sands.

Local universities said that they try to make lefties feel more comfortable.

"All our seminar and study rooms have tables that can be used by all users, left-handers or right-handers. The flip-up writing tops on the chairs of our auditoriums are also suitable for all users," said a spokesman for Singapore Management University.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University said they have not received any requests from students to "customise furniture for their needs".

NUS student Jolena Ang, 19, said left-handers like her have adapted, and hassles are mostly minor.

She cited tapping ez-link cards, using swing-up tables and writing in notebooks ring-bound on the left as such instances.

Being a southpaw has not stopped her from being a fencer. For the sport, she bought gloves and a sabre specially made for left-handers.

As Mr Nah puts it: "I don't feel abnormal. It feels cool to be different."