

A Healthier CNY, A Healthier You!

Text by Dr Tan Tze Lee, Deputy Editor

BURP! That is likely the sound we all made as we bade farewell to 2017, after many days of feasting and festivities with the numerous Christmas and New Year's Eve parties. Thankfully, Chinese New Year (CNY) 2018 comes a whole six weeks later, giving us a small window to recover from the year-end feasting.

Since CNY comes but once a year, would a minor indiscretion food-wise do that much harm? Sadly, the CNY goodies we love so much are simply packed full of calories. And like it or not, it all adds up.

So if you, like me, can't resist having that piece of *bak kwa*, two pineapple tarts, four love letters (aren't they just delicious?), four shrimp rolls, one fried *nian gao* and a can of green tea, that would be 961 kcal for just one visit!

Oh dear, so what can we do for ourselves and our patients to help navigate the 15 (or more) days of feasting that comes with every CNY?

Gearing up for the feast

There is some good news: CNY arrives only on 16 February, which gives us

time to prepare mentally, physically and gastronomically for the two-week marathon sessions of eating and feasting. With the beginning of the Gregorian calendar, it is a good opportunity for all of us to make good those New Year's resolutions (to exercise more) we made on 31 December. Let us break out those exercise shoes and start off the year with a jog around the track. Not only will it assuage our guilt for not exercising enough, it will also help us to work up an appetite for the feasting to follow!

During the reunion dinner, learn to eat slowly and be conscious of what you are eating. Beware of the *yusheng*, as it is absolutely packed full of calories. The second helping usually comes with the exhortation: "It is just salad, very good for you! Have some more!" The goodness comes with 561 kcal per serving, which is more than a bowl of *bak chor mee*! And that is just the starter.

There may also be some alcohol being served, which too are packed full of calories. A standard lager beer will have around 180 kcal per can, so a six-pack will easily set you back 1080 kcal! If you do drink, it is best to do so in moderation. And do remember that if you drink, don't drive! The traffic police will be out in full force, so do

Just to give you a sense of what we are looking at:¹

- ⚠ 1 slice of *bak kwa* contains 229 kcal
- ⚠ 1 piece of pineapple tart contains 80 kcal
- ⚠ 4 pieces of love letters contain 224 kcal
- ⚠ 3 pieces of *nian gao* contain 150kcal
(If it is fried, the calories increase dramatically)
- ⚠ "Soft" drinks contain 140 to 150 kcal in a standard 330ml can (making us soft and flabby)
- ⚠ 6 *kueh bangkit* contain 137 kcal
- ⚠ 1 fried shrimp roll contains 23 kcal

not take the chance that you might just get away with it. You won't!

One should avoid being hungry when going on visitations. If possible, have a bite to eat before you go, preferably with high-fibre, low-calorie food that fills you up. Learn to eat slower and chew your food thoroughly. That will give you a better sense of satiety and help you to avoid overeating.

Also, try to avoid sugary drinks as much as possible. These are packed full of sugar and are often the source of hidden calories that lead to putting on the kilos. We should be mindful that even "healthier" sweet drinks, like green tea and fruit juices, are sweetened and have lots of calories as well. One 240 ml glass of orange juice contains 112 kcal, which is the same as a soft drink. Choose water or unsweetened tea as a low-calorie alternative.

One of the greatest temptations we face is the great spread of CNY treats at every home we visit. Proudly displayed on the main dining table, its many culinary enticements wink lovingly at all the visitors, willing us to pick them up and pop those tasty morsels into our mouths. Many of them would have been lovingly made by an aunt or grandmother. Temptation is great and sometimes the moral obligation to try this or that is all the more when the eyes of the baker peruse your every action.

I try my best not to sit for too long at the table, where the enticing morsels are too conveniently within reach. I would usually be armed with a cup of hot tea, the other hand gripping a delicious morsel, as I walk around having a good chat with my loved

ones. Not only are you less likely to be waylaid by another tasty morsel, but you would have a better chance to have that chat with that long-lost auntie who had flown 14 hours to get home for the festivities.

Whatever your feelings and emotions are when it comes to CNY, don't forget why we celebrate it. It is a time for us to gather with our loved ones, to share in the joy and love that comes from being part of a family. The goodies are just a fringe benefit.

Wishing you all a happy, joyous and healthy CNY in advance! ♦

Dr Tan is a family physician in private practice in Choa Chu Kang. A GP at heart, he believes strongly in family medicine provided by family physicians embedded in the community.



Legend

1. Goodies galore!

Reference

1. Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Chinese New Year feasting? Not quite over. Available at: <https://goo.gl/xuvYWo>.



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