

A vibrant photograph of a group of people, primarily women, celebrating joyfully. They are blowing colorful confetti into the air, creating a festive atmosphere. The confetti is in various colors like red, blue, green, and yellow. The people are dressed in casual, celebratory attire. The background is bright and slightly out of focus, emphasizing the people and the falling confetti.

CELEBRATE

Cheers to Health!

Raise a glass to good health and learn how to create meaningful and memorable celebrations that prioritise health and wellness.

Human beings are social creatures who need connectivity and relationships. When families and friends come together to celebrate milestones such as birthdays and anniversaries, joyous occasions and festivities, such events offer us a platform to deepen bonds and rekindle relationships in a fun, enjoyable setting. In fact, celebrations are essential parts of our lives as we share joyful moments of achievements and commemorations and create wonderful memories together.



Beverly Koh, party planner (left) and her daughter

CELEBRATIONS TO CHERISH

Celebrations give us the perfect opportunity and reason to bring people together. They become reunions that allow far-flung family members and old friends to see each other. These moments reinforce the continuity and endurance of meaningful family ties and friendships.

However, celebrations have always been connected to food and drinks (including alcohol), as well as fun and merry-making can have adverse effects on health. The notion of a 'healthy celebration' may sound like an oxymoron but it doesn't have to be. It is important to find a balance between having fun and staying healthy. In today's post-pandemic world, we are more conscious about health and wellness—whether it is physical, mental or spiritual health.

The bottom line is not to take anything to the extreme and practise moderation even when we are having fun.

Beverly Koh, founder of Pretty Pink Party by Heavenly, recognises the positive aspects of healthy celebrations.

"Celebrating life events such as life milestones, marriages and anniversaries while gathering for food and drink is something positive and memorable, as well as socially accepted and supported," she says. "And healthy celebrations also tend to be associated with outcomes including increased life-span and decreased anxiety and depression."

Koh warns that there may be a tendency for people to overindulge during celebrations with the variety of food and drink served. So, it's important to have a healthy celebration by managing food and drink intake to avoid risks, such as obesity, getting drunk and other health complications.

She notes that planning a celebration event is not an easy feat and can be both mentally and physically stressful and tiring. There are many details involved from budgeting to the guest list to catering and everything in between.

"It's quite common to engage party planners nowadays. When the clients pass the job to us, we will advise them on every aspect of the planning

"There are many thoughtful and practical ways to create celebrations that are healthier, that prioritise wellness and sustainability. This can include offering healthier food and drinks, limiting alcohol consumption, incorporating physical activities, and focusing on social connections."

CELEBRATE

details, from the food orders to the venues and decorations. We can help to take the stress away from them so that they can just come on that day to enjoy and celebrate," says Koh.

HEALTHY, TASTY SERVINGS

"I think we should clear the myth that healthy and nutritional food is tasteless," says Hannah Wong, senior dietitian and founder of Alpha Nutrition Academy. "With some cooking skills and the knowledge of the ingredients, healthy food can be flavourful and even enhance the whole eating experience."

She says when it comes to a celebrations and parties, the host can choose to offer healthier versions of food and drinks.

"For instance, we can use more natural herbs and spices instead of the normal sauces that are full of

MSG. Natural spices like turmeric, black peppers and even garlic are very flavourful and they also look colourful," she says.

Wong sees healthy eating is gradually becoming a growing trend, and people are willing to spend more for healthy food for health reasons.

"There are many healthy options of food in the market today, so it is not a problem to request caterers to modify to a healthier menu for your party," she says. "I believe that healthy food served during celebrations can send a message of healthy eating to the guests.

Meanwhile, Koh noticed more young couples these days are health conscious and incorporate healthy food such as keto diets into their wedding menus. Compared to a decade ago when most would have gone with the typical banquet menu in

"Instead of serving sweetened beverage or soft drinks, one can consider water infused by fresh fruits such as oranges or watermelons."

hotels and restaurants, many of them are now opting for less heavy meals with less oil and less sugar.

"Some of them prefer to opt for something simpler to celebrate their weddings. Instead of dinner banquets, they may have high tea or afternoon tea," she says.

Sugar is a big culprit that can lead to many health problems and weight gain. Wong says instead of serving sweetened beverages or soft drinks, one can consider water infused by fresh fruits such as oranges or watermelons. Lemongrass drink is also healthy and nice-tasting.

Serving alcoholic drinks is often the 'norm' of adult celebrations, but Wong says to have a healthier celebration, alcohol consumption should be limited.

Hannah Wong, dietitian



"Excessive alcohol consumption can have negative effects on health, not to mention it can affect our behaviours. So instead, we can offer healthier alternatives such as mocktails or sparkling water," she says.

Wong also offers some tips on not overeating during celebrations.

"The sequence of what to eat is very important. At parties, you should eat vegetables or salads first, followed by protein and lastly carbohydrate. Because when you are already half-full with healthier food, you will eat less carbohydrates. Dessert would be the last option. It is also important to control the amount you take and always only eat until you feel 70 per cent full.

"You are what you eat. If you eat good food that nourishes and boosts your immune system, it is good for health maintenance long term. We won't see the effects overnight but if you consume too much during

celebrations, in the long term that can affect your health," she says.

FUN AND HEALTHY KIDS PARTIES

Both Koh and Wong note that the healthy celebration trend is being seen most in children's parties.

"This is obvious as compared to children's birthday parties 10 years ago," says Koh. "Today's parents tend to be healthier. They would normally give healthy lunchboxes and sugar-free drinks for their kids, and so healthy food is now a norm in kids birthday parties too."

As a planner for children's parties, Koh often must search for less oily and sugar-free food options according to the client's requirements.

There are indeed many creative ways to prepare healthy food for children's parties. One example, says Wong, is to make rolls such as cabbage rolls, and add some chicken floss or pumpkin floss.

Children's parties won't be complete without some fun activities. Koh says they can include clown entertainment to bouncy castle, slides and various games that require some physical activities. On the other hand, there can be arts and crafts sessions or educational quizzes and games.

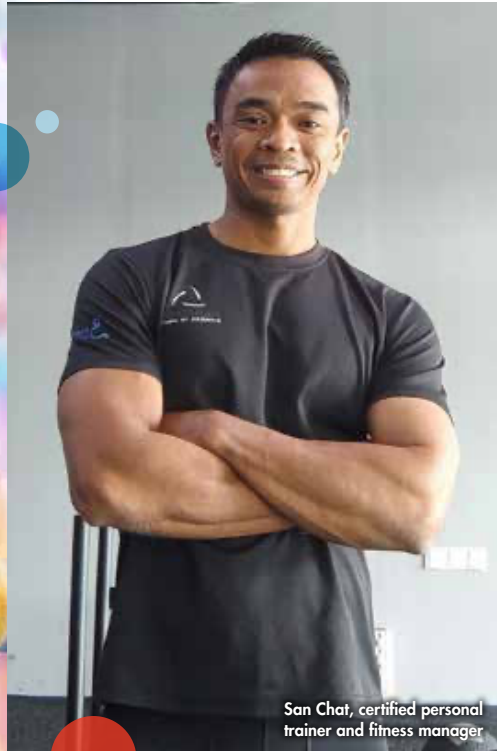
Koh says many young families are living a healthier lifestyle. Besides eating healthily, parents are also willing to spend their weekends doing outdoor activities with their children. It is important that the young generation is shown how to live healthily to gear towards a sustainable and healthy life in the future.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Meanwhile, adults can also 'get physical' during celebrations. Food and drinks may not need to take centre stage as we can incorporate fun themes and activities that make celebrations healthier.



CELEBRATE



San Chat, certified personal trainer and fitness manager

"There can be many ideas for outdoor celebrations and parties held during the day, from having a garden party or party by the beach to a picnic, camping or pool party with games that require physical movements."

For instance, one can plan outdoor activities such as hiking, biking or playing sports.

Dance is also a great way to get moving and can be done both outdoors and indoors.

"I would usually advise my clients to have some entertainment as it will make the whole event more lively and fun," says Koh. "We can have a Zumba or ballroom dancing theme. When you have music and some kind of dancing, it will be helpful and motivating to those who don't normally exercise."

"Day-time celebrations can be healthier, as we can include healthier refreshments and not serving alcohol, or just a limited amount of alcohol," Koh adds.

"It's good to celebrate, but we need to balance it with physical exercise. Some people think, 'Today I can

eat more as I will go to the gym and exercise tomorrow.' This is the wrong concept," says San Chat, a certified personal trainer and fitness manager at Paradigm Fitness, Penang.

He reckons celebrations are for us to enjoy but we should always do it in moderation.

"It is important to have the knowledge and practice of living a healthy lifestyle. Choose some sports and activities you like so you can sustain it over time," he says. He recommends building strength and conditioning to muscles and joints in the long run.

When it comes to parties and celebrations, San Chat believes that an active and sporty person would usually celebrate in moderation. They would choose better food and drinks and have certain limits when having fun.

MINDFUL AND MEANINGFUL CELEBRATIONS

Psychologically, celebrations have many positive effects when we have a healthy mindset. For one, celebrations give us the occasions to be sociable and not keep to ourselves. They are a great way to connect with one another and build or rekindle relationships. Giving people the chance to celebrate milestones is an essential way to nurture their inner health.

Looking beyond the food and funfair, celebrations are when we can spend quality time with loved ones and close friends, have good conversations or even play games to enjoy each other's company. Don't underestimate the advantages of celebrations, which can be as powerful in a small, quiet gathering as in a big party.

So, with a healthy conscience in mind, let's celebrate in a manner that is fun, meaningful and healthy. ☐