



Don't toss caution away!

Feast on good food this Chinese New Year, but try not to overindulge. >3



At open house buffets, as seen in this filepic, choose a smaller plate in order to trick your mind that you have eaten more than you actually have.



Opt for healthy snacks during CNY, like sunflower seeds, also known as kuaci.

As we usher in a new decade this year, we should note that 2020 is also the auspicious Year of the Rat, which marks the beginning of a new 12-year Chinese zodiac cycle.

Although the rat may not be everyone's favourite animal, we could learn a thing or two from this lean and mean creature, as we get ready for Chinese New Year (CNY) festivities with family and friends.

When you are making the rounds for CNY visits back at your hometown or in the city, it can be difficult to let go and enjoy yourself without feeling like you are sabotaging your healthy diet.

With endless rounds of pineapple tarts and a myriad of cookies at every open house, to the third *ye sang* of the day, followed by a 10-course dinner; CNY feasting can result in indigestion, or even worse, put serious toll on your body and kidneys.

Inspired by the aforementioned furry little mammal that eats a variety of food at healthy intervals throughout the day, while still managing to maintain a high level of energy and metabolism by scurrying around actively throughout the day (and night), here are some healthy eating tips to help you stay happy during and after the celebration.

Go for smaller portions

It is always tempting to heap your plate with lots of food at CNY open house buffet parties.

But if you do so at every house you visit during this festive season, you will almost certainly end the holiday feeling horribly bloated and uncomfortable.

Instead, take a cue from our rodent *sifu* (mentor) and try having smaller bites at each meal.

One way around this is to use a smaller plate.

Did you know that using a larger plate actually tricks your brain into thinking portion sizes are smaller, which makes you more likely to eat more?

Scientists call this the Delboeuf Illusion.

Conversely, by filling a smaller plate, you

Eat like a rat

Here are some tips on how to prevent yourself from overeating during the upcoming Year of the Rat festivities.

can trick your brain into feeling satisfied with much less.

Pick healthier snacks and ingredients

The furry chef who cooks up a feast in the 2007 animated movie *Ratatouille* would suggest having some delicious, yet healthy snacks on your table.

This is not only for your guests, but also for the times when you succumb to temptation and decide to raid the pantry for a snack or two!

High in fibre, protein and healthy fats, a handful of nuts like pistachios, almonds and walnuts, or seeds like sunflower seeds and melon seeds, make for a nutritious snack, while their fibre content helps you to feel full for longer.

Choose nuts that are roasted, baked or raw.

Avoid those that are fried or coated in sugar, honey or salt.

Another option is fresh fruits that are packed with lots of healthy nutrients and can satisfy your sweet tooth as well.

Drink more water, not sugar

The CNY season in Malaysia is usually hot and dry, hence the temptation to drink buckets of cordial drinks and soft drinks during the holidays.

Amidst the festivities, it is also easy to focus on the food that you eat and forget about what it is that you are drinking throughout the day.

Sugary and carbonated drinks will only add extra calories to your diet, without other essential nutrients that bring long-term benefits.

A packet drink alone may already contain about four to five teaspoons of sugar (80 to 100 calories).

For an average healthy adult, it is recommended not to exceed 50g (about 10 teaspoons) of sugar intake per day.

This amount can be easily exceeded if sweetened beverages are consumed.

Your best option is still plain water, which is free from calories.

Alternatively, go for unsweetened beverages like Chinese tea.

Walk or cycle when visiting friends

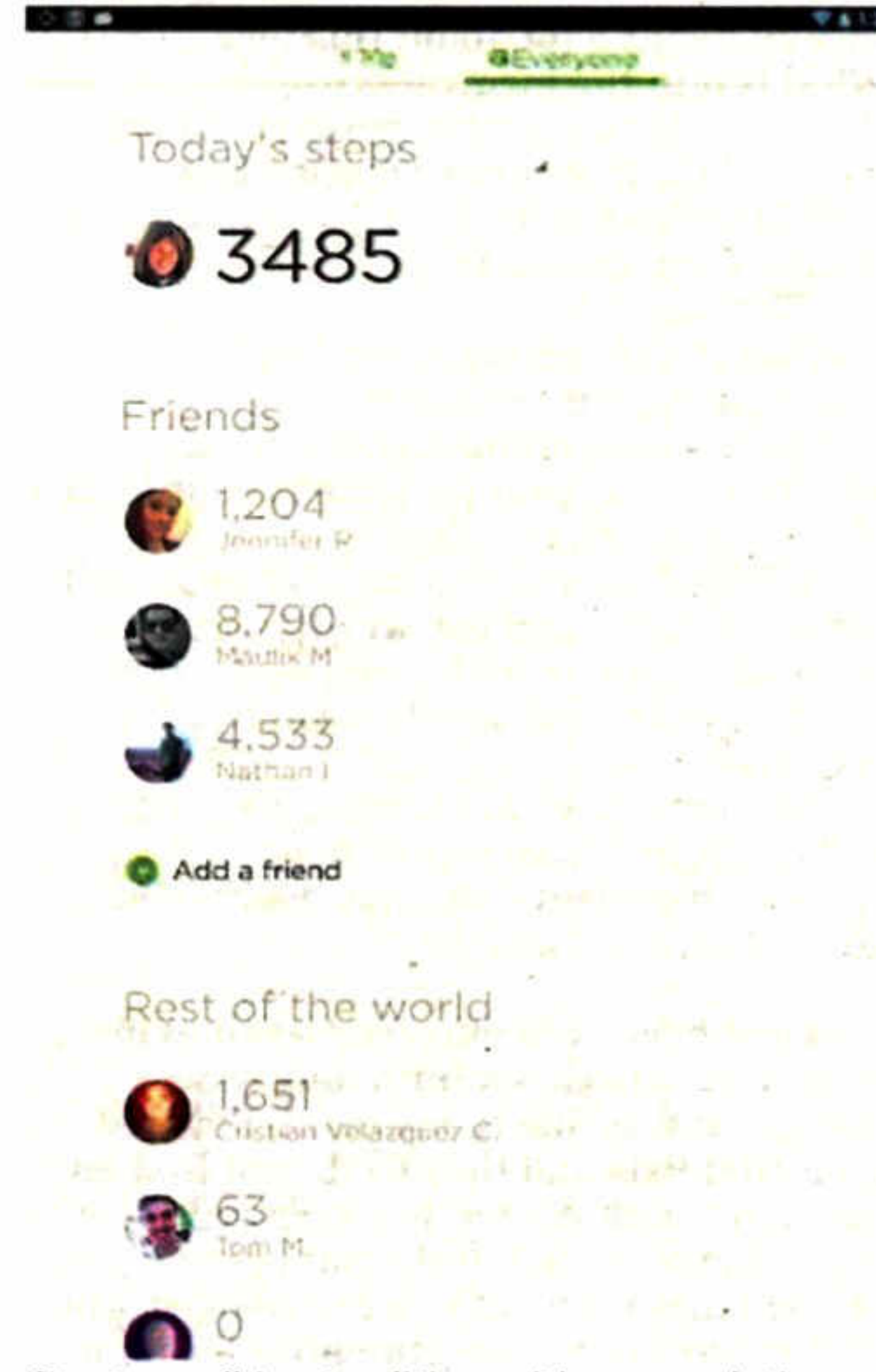
If you are heading to several close-by locations for CNY visits at your hometown, why not burn some extra calories with a leisurely stroll or bicycle ride?

At your family gatherings, it might be a good time to spice things up with a daily-steps count competition on your smartphones or smart watches.

Make it a new tradition!

While you don't have to run on a treadmill like a lab rat, a slow walk after meals may be helpful to aid digestion.

And instead of just sitting around chatting or taking a nap, you can also create active opportunities to shed extra calories throughout the day, such as by going for a hike or a swim, playing badminton 'over the gate' or any other kind of sports with your relatives.



Start a walking tradition with your relatives and have a healthy competition over the number of steps you achieve during the festivities.

Alternatively, you may try climbing the stairs instead of taking the lift at shopping malls or at residential apartments.

The tips above are very basic and easy to apply.

Healthy eating should become an integral part of our Malaysian lifestyle, even during celebrations like Chinese New Year when food often takes centre stage.

Let us celebrate the year 2020 with habits that nourish our wellbeing and make us winners, just like the rat who came in first in the zodiac race.

This article is courtesy of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) of Malaysia.