

PUT YOUR Aprons ON!

TEAM BUILDING THROUGH COOKING

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It was that time of the year again when we had to brainstorm and organise our annual team-building activity for the clinic. As members of the Workplace Health Promotion team, we are in charge of everything that promotes health, wellness and team spirit among the staff of Woodlands Polyclinic. Hoping to get our hands on the most popular team-building activity, we decided to conduct an online vote to see what our staff's preferences really were.

As I scrolled through the long list of suggested activities, "cooking" struck me. I never thought that cooking could actually be a team-building activity and although I do not cook, I was keen to try something hands-on and also learn some recipes.

Out of sheer curiosity, I voted "cooking" as my first choice. After about two weeks of voting and debating, the verdict was out. And guess what was voted as the most popular team-building activity?

Just as the old Chinese saying goes, "民以食为天" (the common people regard food as their most essential want), what better way is there than to bond people over a good meal?

Assembly for action

So on a sultry Saturday afternoon, 80 of us found ourselves in the middle of Culinary On's studio, greeted by the spacious and sunnily lit studio overlooking the serene surrounding urban scenery. We met our friendly chefs who quickly divided up the large thronging crowd into three teams – orange, green and blue – each sharing a large kitchen. Each large kitchen is further divided into ten counters where seven to eight people would share the space for cooking.

Alas, it was two o'clock when the teams were sorted and lunch beckoned. To our delight, we found delicious snacks served on cosy looking wooden kitchen counters and everyone made a dash for them. As we wolfed down bite-sized snacks such as puffs, pizzas, Danishes, Vietnamese spring rolls, chicken waffles and prawn crackers, and sipped on piping hot beverages, it was truly relaxing to catch up and mingle with our colleagues and friends. Upbeat pop music blared in the background, hyping everyone up for the upcoming action.

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The menu for the day was salmon pasta with zucchini or vegetarian pasta (to take into account everyone's dietary preferences), and for dessert, we were going to make our very own chocolate lava cakes!

Donning our cheery orange aprons, we all crowded around one of the counters to watch Chef Daniel demonstrate how to make pasta from scratch. With grace, dexterity and a wry sense of humour, he showed us how to beat and mix the eggs with the pasta flour to make pasta dough mixture. After kneading repeatedly, he passed the dough through a pasta maker and the pasta became flatter and flatter with each pass. Finally, the flattened dough was cut up into nice neat strands by the machine and our own handmade pasta was ready!

It was soon our turn to get our hands dirty! As we kneaded the dough mixture repeatedly, adding flour bit by bit, we held our own competition to see which counter could get the longest pasta dough without breaking it. My team kept on passing the dough mixture through the pasta maker until it was really wafer thin. Once there were holes, we would fold the dough a little and pass it through the machine again until everything was pressed smoothly like a piece of cloth. Eventually, the pasta lengthened to an extent where our team of eight had to space ourselves out to each carry a portion of the long pasta dough, taking extra care not to break the pasta. With absolute determination and teamwork, our group won the challenge of having the longest pasta that spanned over ten metres with no breakages at all!

Next up, we made our very own chocolate lava cake! We had to first powder the aluminium cups with flour after brushing butter on top, before making the chocolate mixture. We heated Haagen-Dazs chocolate chips over a pan and a nice aroma wafted through the air. It was tedious and tiring to stir the viscous melted mixture and we took turns to whip it. Finally, we poured the thick fragrant chocolate mixture into the cups, filling each about three-quarters full.

While waiting for the chocolate lava cake to bake in the oven, we crowded around the chef's central counter to prepare our salmon. To our pleasant surprise, the fellow male doctors in my



team took the lead to slice the salmon, and they looked every bit professional and unfazed like master chefs. A few younger guys in my clinic, who were cooking amateurs, were "nominated" by friends to cook on behalf of all of us. Amid boisterous cheers and roaring laughter, the "chefs" danced to the beat of the music, stirring the big pots of pasta with cream sauce, fresh salmon slices and zucchini. Of course, to ensure quality control, our Chef Daniel tasted the dishes to make sure that everything was prepared to the right standards.

Fulfilling meal

Finally, it was time to feast! With great anticipation, our master chef professionally dished out the salmon pasta onto individual plates. Our long-awaited chocolate lava cake was finally ready as well! We all sat at the tables savouring the mouth-watering fruit of our labour, and I was very full after downing the salmon pasta. It was rich, tasty and truly filling. Yet, I did not want to miss my enticing chocolate lava cake topped with vanilla ice cream so I gobbled it down nevertheless.

The saying that "a full stomach is a happy stomach" holds very true indeed. We posed for photos with our chef who presented us with certificates for completing our master culinary course and that marked the end of our fun-

filled session. As we prepared to leave the studio, with recipe books in hand, everyone was patting their stomachs in contentment and beaming excitedly. There was already a buoyant and lively chatter about doing cooking again in the coming year since everyone enjoyed it so much. It was thumbs up all around for this enthralling team-building experience!

Next time, when you cannot decide what to do for an outing with friends or family, do consider cooking – you would never imagine how fun it is to cook, feast and catch up all at the same time! ◆

Legend

1. Mouth-watering chocolate lava cake with vanilla ice cream and raspberry sauce
2. Tasty salmon pasta with zucchini
3. My team and I preparing the pasta dough
4. Our team won the challenge of having the longest pasta among all the teams!

Dr Chie enjoys freelance writing and singing. She writes for Lianhe Zaobao, Shin Min Daily News and Health No. 1. She can be reached at chiezhying@gmail.com.



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