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Ushering in a Sweet Lunar New Year with Isomalt

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The Year of the Dragon is upon us, and this Lunar New Year is set to be another year filled with joy, celebration and cherished reunions with family and loved ones. Around 2 billion people globally celebrate the Lunar New Year, with a substantial number residing in the East and Southeast Asia regions.[1] During this major occasion, food holds a special significance, with many families laying out an extravagant array of delectable snacks for everyone to savour. Sweet treats, in particular, are especially popular, as eating them symbolises the ushering in of a sweet life into the new year.

However, with the Lunar New Year typically spanning sixteen days, many consumers often overindulge in sugary snacks, and overall health takes a backseat in the spirited atmosphere of the new year. To encourage a balance between festive indulgence and health consciousness, food manufacturers can explore incorporating sugar-reduced and sugar-free ingredients, such as BENEOâ??s Isomalt, into beloved New Year treats. Isomalt is the only sugar replacer derived from sugar beet. It has a rounded sweetness similar to sucrose, with only half the calories.

In addition to its role as a sugar substitute, Isomalt delivers a diverse range of other benefits. It supports dental health and carries an EU health claim for being tooth-friendly, as well as a US health claim for not promoting tooth decay. Isomalt also supports a low glycemic diet, as demonstrated by studies revealing that both blood glucose and insulin levels rise only minimally after consumption, compared with glucose. This is especially relevant when managing diabetes, obesity or cardiovascular diseases. By helping consumers to keep their blood sugar levels more stable, Isomalt increases the â??feel-goodâ?? factor of any sugar-free or sugar-reduced products that it is used in. This proves especially valuable during the new year, allowing consumers to enjoy delightful treats, while at the same time prioritising their health and well-being.

The BENEO-Technology Center (BTC) has developed many Asian-inspired recipes by easily incorporating Isomalt into the production process. Among these creations, there is a notable recipe tailored for the Lunar New Year â?? a reduced-sugar pineapple tart filling.

The pineapple tart is a cherished treat and a popular food item gifted to family and friends. It is a small pastry filled or topped with pineapple jam and is commonly sold and made during the Lunar New Year in Southeast Asia. The pineapple itself is regarded as an auspicious fruit, as its translation in Hokkien and Cantonese dialects means â??fortune comesâ? in English. [2] Although consuming this tasty tart may result in more luck, this treat comes at a price. A single tart packs roughly 73 calories, and is extremely high in fat and sugar. Four pieces of pineapple tart may contain up to 14 teaspoons of sugar. This considerable amount stems from the sugar used to caramelise the pineapple into a jam[3] Hence, replacing sugar with Isomalt provides food manufacturers with the opportunity to present a delicious way to not only reduce calories and sugar but also maintain the sweet taste in traditional confectioneries. Â

The Lunar New Year marks a wonderful time when friends and family come together. Yet, itâ??s crucial to be mindful of our dietary choices and avoid excessive indulgence during this extended holiday period. By using ingredients like Isomalt, food developers can craft traditional treats that prioritise both the joy and well-being of consumers.

Christian Philippsen, Managing Director, BENEO, Asia Pacific

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[1] TIME - 5 Things to Know About Lunar New Year and How Itâ??s Celebrated Across Asia

[2] Michelin Guide â?? Pineapple Tarts: A Piece Of Tropical Singapore

[3] The Straits Times â?? Avoid CNY overeating: Does a love letter biscuit have more calories than a pineapple tart?