

THE LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

By Sandra Chin, MPH, CCC Member

The Lunar New Year Day, which took place on February 10, 2013, was celebrated all over the County of Los Angeles with a myriad of celebrations from parades to music, festivals, and a 5K run.

This Lunar New Year is the year of the snake. The snake is one of 12 animals in the lunar zodiac, and it is believed that persons born in this year are gracious, intelligent, and shrewd with money.

The holiday is celebrated slightly differently by Chinese, Vietnamese and Koreans, even though all are celebrating the beginning of the Lunar year.

In the Chinese tradition, preparation for the New Year often includes house cleaning, settling of old debts, family gatherings around food on New Year's Eve, and food signifying good luck and long life. In addition, lucky money in red envelopes is given to children. Dragon and lion dances, firecrackers and wearing red are believed to keep away unlucky spirits and bring good spirits into the New Year. Tangerines with full green leaves and branches of kumquat or tangerine are brought in the house for good luck. Food such as fish, dumplings (which signify wealth) and New Year rice cake (signifying a prosperous year) are enjoyed at the celebrations.

The Vietnamese New Year (Tet) also involves similar customs such as cleaning the house, giving lucky money to children, and visiting relatives and temples. Colorful branches of kumquat and tangerine are also brought into the house for good luck, and savory foods are eaten such as fish, pork, vegetables, rice cakes, and banh chung (sticky rice wrapped in bamboo and banana leaves), buttery mung beans, and rich pork seasoned with fish sauce, salt and pepper.

The Korean Lunar New Year is celebrated with music, festivals, putting on traditional clothes, and paying respects to elders. Special foods, such as thick rice noodles, dumplings, fish and soup, and visits with family are part of the celebration.

Of course, differences in how the Lunar New Year are celebrated varies by region and family as there is incredible diversity within the Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean communities as well as among the different generations. Regardless of how you celebrate the Lunar New Year in the future, be prepared to experience a feast and to be included as one of the family. Enjoy!