

Idiom by Lon Yan

因小失大

yin1 xiao3 shi1 da4

The obesity crisis in the UK is getting worst because people are falling for a marketing ploy known as upselling. Specifically, the health authorities there are concerned about businesses pushing unhealthy food and larger portions on shoppers.

Shops, cafes and restaurants encourage customers to upgrade to larger meals and drinks or adding high-calorie toppings and sides. A survey found eight in 10 people are falling for such sales tactics every week.

The consumers are getting larger coffees, bigger meals, sweets and chocolates and extra snacks.

They found such offers hard to resist as they only need to pay a little more, which looks like a good bargain, except that they are losing big – their health – in the long run by eating too much and unhealthily.

This is a kind of “因小失大” (*yin1 xiao3 shi1 da4*).

“因” (*yin1*) is “because,” “due to,” “小” (*xiao3*) “small,” “little,” “失” (*shi1*) “to lose,” “to miss,” and “大” (*da4*) “big,” “great,” “huge,” “greatly.” Literally, “因小失大” (*yin1 xiao3 shi1 da4*) is “big loss due to small gain.”

It means “to try to save a little only to lose a lot,” “to spoil (or lose) the ship for a halfpennyworth (僅值半便士的東西；無價值之物) of tar,” “to suffer a big loss for a little gain.” A typical example is saving a few dollars buying discount food, just to find that it is of a poor quality.

The expression “can’t see the forest for the trees” also carries the connotation of “因小失大” (*yin1 xiao3 shi1 da4*).

Terms containing the character “因” (*yin1*) include:

因此 (*yin1 ci3*) – therefore; hence; thus

因為 (*yin1 wei4*) – because; as; since

因素 (*yin1 su4*) – a factor; a cause

因果 (*yin1 guo3*) – cause and effect; karma