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Have five servings of fruits and vegetables a day

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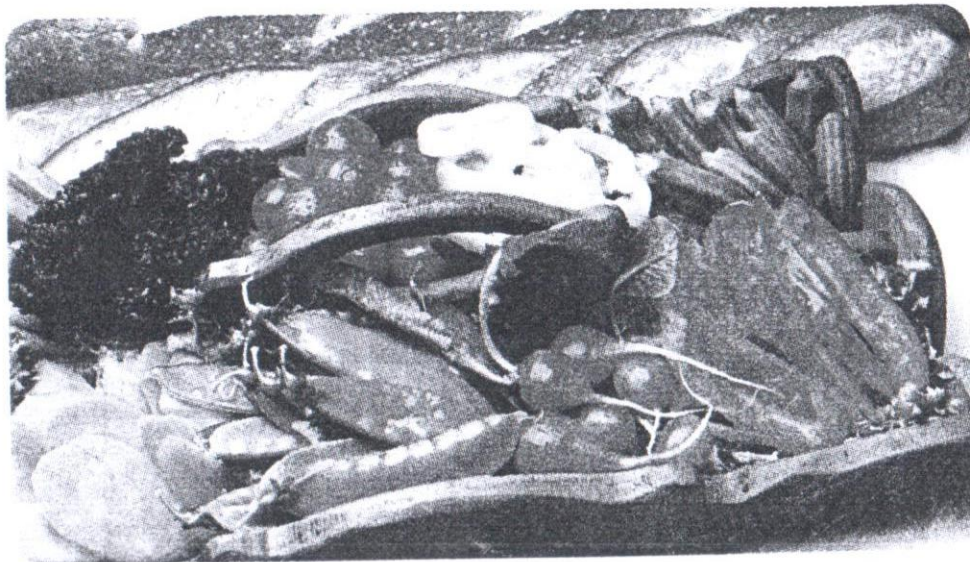
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Have five servings of fruits and vegetables a day

"Five a Day" was a slogan used in a broad educational campaign began in the United States in 1991 under the auspices of the National Institute of Health. The campaign was to urge Americans of all ages to eat at least five servings of fresh fruits and vegetables a day. This ambitious effort to change a nation's dietary habits was based on the pleasing flavour and attractiveness of fruits and vegetables and the health benefits derived from their increased consumption.

The results of this campaign were not long in coming. The change in dietary habits is having a positive impact on the health of Americans. The use of vegetables and vegetable products in countries of Anglo-Saxon extraction is increasing, while, unfortunately, Mediterranean and Third World countries are increasing their consumption of meats and meat products. In the former East Germany, for example, the diet was characterised by extensive consumption of sausages, animal fats, butter and less vegetables, fruits and vegetable oils compared to West Germany. However, since Germany's reunification in 1989, the use of fresh vegetables and fruits has increased dramatically in the former East Germany. As a result, there has been a decrease in death rate from cardiovascular disease, which was previously very high.

We are all aware that children prefer fast food such as French-fries and fried chicken and fish. But strategies need to be developed to change their preference by putting on the table foods that are as delicious as possible. Many would prefer fresh salads to cooked vegetables or soups and giving information appropriate to the age of the child at home, school and media about the benefits of vegetables and fruits would



GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

help to change this preference. Remember, no vegetable fattens even when eaten in huge quantities.

Vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, fibre and hundreds of substances that are active all over the organism. These are called phytochemicals. Although not much research has been done on these elements, science has confirmed that they have preventive powers against cancer and arteriosclerosis. They are present in all amounts, they are

not nutrients and do not supply calories. In spite of their name, they are not elements in the chemical sense but rather, complex substances of diverse nature. Names given to these newly discovered substances include flavonoids, anthocyanidines, isoflavones, lignans, sulfurous compounds, terpenes or monoterpenes, carotenoids and phytates.

When phytates were discovered, they were considered an anti-nutritive factor because they reduce the absorption of iron, zinc, and other minerals. However, this is not a serious drawback since plants containing phytates also contain abundant iron and other minerals. In addition, it has been recently discovered

that they are effective anti-oxidants and anti-carcinogens. They are present in whole grains and legumes.

Isoflavones, present in legumes such as soya beans, have therapeutic (healing) components such as phytoestrogens (vegetable-based female hormone) with similar effects to oestrogen – produced in the ovaries – but without the undesirable side effects. The phytoestrogens induce effects such as increased mineralisation of bones and protect the body from arteriosclerosis. They, however, impede the growth of uterine and breast cells, which reduce the risk of cancer. It is, therefore, indicated to female patients to eat soya beans to regulate menstruation and obtain relief from menopausal symptoms.

This means that a diet based on soy and derivatives provides a valid and effective oestrogen hormone replacement therapy. It has the same beneficial effects on the bones and heart, with great advantage that it protects against breast and uterine prostate.

Japanese men have lower mortality rate due to prostate cancer because of consumption of soy products, particularly Tofu. Blackgrape, strawberry, pomegranate, and blueberry are source of anthocyanidines, which are found to have cardio-protective properties, increase venous circulation and are urinary antiseptics.

"Five a Day" as a campaign tool has been instrumental in the reduction of cholesterol levels and cases of cardiovascular disease in the US. While one must bear in mind other positive factors such as reducing smoking, the change in dietary habits is having a significant positive impact in western countries.