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# Way to fewer weak hearts

Karanja, Solomon

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# Way to fewer weak hearts

## GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

Visiting grandparents and distant uncles and aunts across the ridges during vacations on foot were tests of endurance. The hills to be climbed were steep and the distances sometimes long.

During such visits the elderly got temporary reprieve from their everyday chores of drawing water from the river, collecting firewood, and weeding small shambas from the extra visiting hands of grandchildren. The resilience showed by these forebearers was legendary. It was necessary. It was useful. It kept them heart healthy.

The heart muscle works nonstop everyday. The daily work output is equivalent to the effort of a mason lifting two kilos of bricks up a 10-metre height by hand.

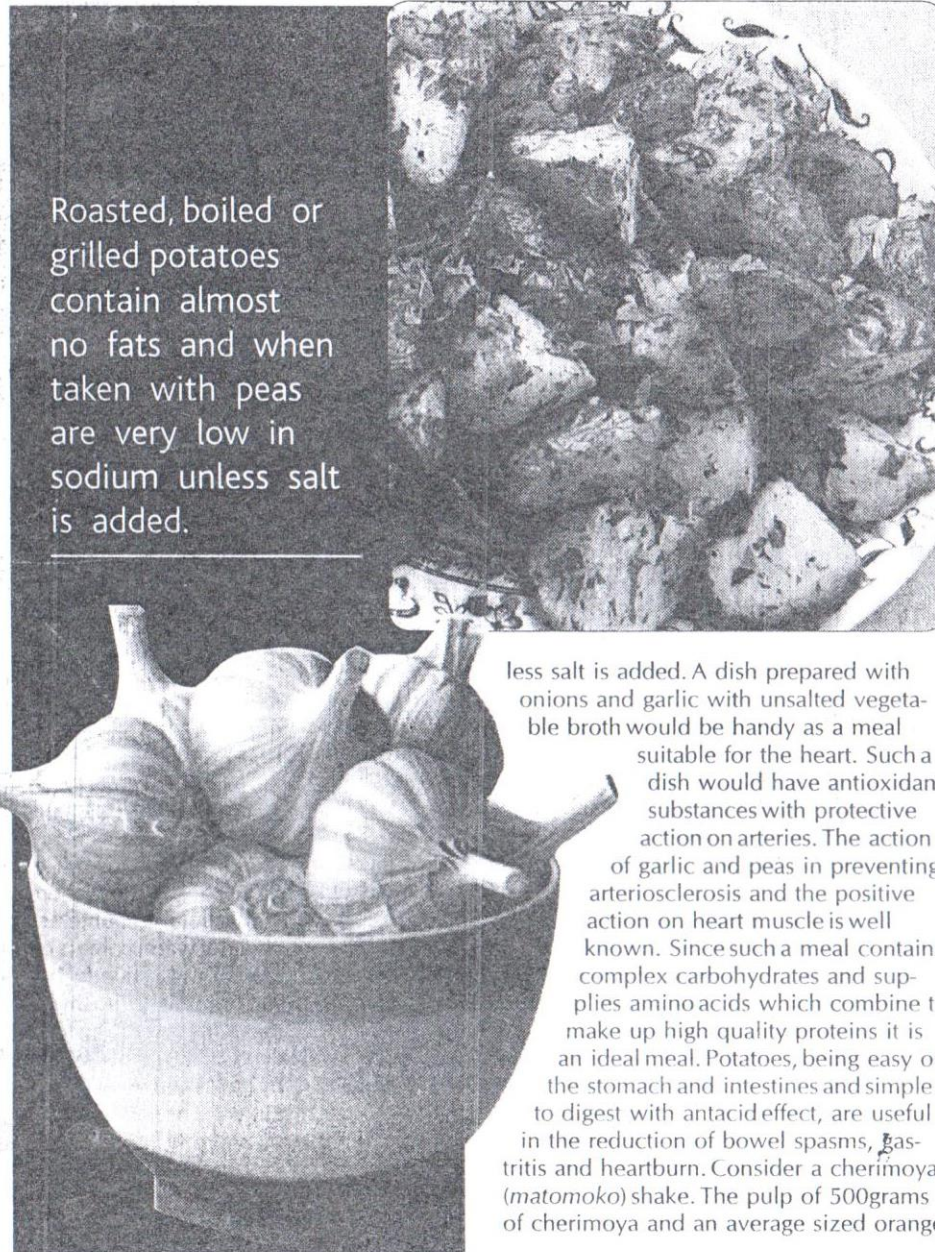
This small but vital organ is busy. No wonder the Bible records "my son...above all else guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life." (Proverbs 4: 20- 23.)

The American Heart Association warns that among the causes of heart disease are a number of factors closely related to modernity including less physical activity at work, increased use and availability of alcohol and tobacco, greater vehicular mobility and use of saturated fats. If the food we eat is the fuel for this busy and vital organ, care needs to be taken, unless one wants the organ to start failing.

Top quality fuel need not cost a fortune a day. Recommended guidelines include a reduction of sugar, salt, fats and increases in vegetables and fruits.

For instance, roasted, boiled or grilled potatoes contain almost no fats and when taken with peas are very low in sodium un-

less salt is added. A dish prepared with onions and garlic with unsalted vegetable broth would be handy as a meal suitable for the heart. Such a dish would have antioxidant substances with protective action on arteries. The action of garlic and peas in preventing arteriosclerosis and the positive action on heart muscle is well known. Since such a meal contains complex carbohydrates and supplies amino acids which combine to make up high quality proteins it is an ideal meal. Potatoes, being easy on the stomach and intestines and simple to digest with antacid effect, are useful in the reduction of bowel spasms, gastritis and heartburn. Consider a cherimoya (matomoko) shake. The pulp of 500grams of cherimoya and an average sized orange



blended together is an ideal drink. Cherimoya, the fresh fruit with the highest known b-complex vitamins also has a good supply of calcium, phosphorus, iron and potassium. Since the orange contains vitamin C and b-carotene, the shake is not only useful for heart conditions. The immune stimulating effects of vitamin C in oranges empowers the vitamins and minerals of the cherimoya. Interestingly, the nervous system also benefits from the shake due to the readily available sugars of both fruits — easily utilised by the neurons. Two ripe bananas and a fresh orange flavoured with molasses and diluted with water to make 250ml served to heart patients once daily is another example. The bananas are rich in potassium and low in sodium. Bananas also have low levels of serotonin, a vasodilating ingredient that improves arterial blood circulation. The medicinal properties of bananas are potentiated by high levels of vitamin c and b-carotene and flavonoids of orange which exert antioxidant and thinning action on blood. This juice is important in heart patients and those who are hypertensive since it is low in saturated fats.

Prevention of conditions of weakened heart starts early in childhood and children must be allowed to play and be children.

Women of reproductive age produce oestrogen which tends to lower cholesterol but menopause quickly withdraws this protective action, making them vulnerable. They should be encouraged to start being careful and prepare for this cardiovascular eventuality earlier in life.

Knowledge of contents of the food we take should be enhanced and the gospel of good living spread far and wide if we are to ensure that we have fewer weak hearts. What better legacy can this generation leave than a heart health assurance of the next?