

Vegetables are no longer the poor man's food

GOOD LIVING

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In the old days, roast meat was a rare delicacy in the villages as the cost was beyond the reach of common folk and animals were slaughtered ceremoniously and for a purpose. The advent of the cash economy brought with it meat selling outlets — butcheries — that used to sell only boiled heads, legs and stuffed offal, mitura. Meat was bought only for family meals at home.

The time is ripe for everyone to go back to basics and use greens, legumes, tubers and cereals as the main sources of calories and reserve meat for the ailing, the elderly and for ceremonies and special occasions.

Never again will vegetables and fruits be relegated to playing a subsidiary role in our diets like they have hitherto.

Never again will plant based foods be considered to be for the poor and the weak. Meals prepared will vary according to community and environment but the base material will basically be the same. The right and proper use of chlorine and limewater to disinfect raw vegetables is very effective and should be popularised to allow for healthy use of a variety of vegetables from many sources. Cabbages, lettuces and other greens that have been soaked for five minutes in limewater have been found to be completely free of cholera bacilli and safe. This reduces the need for overcooking the vegetables. The steaming or microwaving of vegetables has also been found to be the most effective method of preserving the nutrients found in the vegetables. Vegetables provide water, minerals — potassium, calcium, iron — fibre, chlorophyll, carbohydrates, proteins,



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chilled, and used as soon as possible after preparation. It is best taken raw.

Important useful ingredients are present in minute quantities in plant based diets that help the body to ward off diseases like cancer, and research is ongoing on their effects on other ailments like diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, and hypertension.

Some plants contain certain known toxic substances which are inactivated by either washing, cooking or sometimes both and often where

possible they should be taken when ripe. Spinach, rhubarb and chard contain oxalic acid which is destroyed by cooking in water. Yams, sweet potatoes and tapioca contain acids which disappear on cooking and washing.

Tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and eggplant contain an alkaloid which disappears if they are allowed to ripen and is partially destroyed when cooked. Cabbages and turnips have ingredients which when used for excessively long periods interfere with thyroid function.

Consumption of vegetables is ideal in cases of obesity as they contain almost no fat and their calorific content is very low. They produce a sensation of fullness that substantially relieves the feeling of hunger.

As a result of their low energy levels, their calcifying action and their anticarcinogenic activity, they are ideal foods for the elderly.

A study done in 1996 and reported in the British Medical Journal by Thorogood et al at Oxford University showed that eating one salad a day consisting of raw vegetables reduces death rate from heart attack by 26 per cent. In another study reported in Madrid, Spain, it was found that by having a salad at the beginning of a meal, not only does it provide digestive enzymes that aid digestion but it also prevents an inflammation process which occurs in the intestines after beginning a meal with cooked foods called digestive leucocytosis.

There is sufficient evidence to support the theory that fruits and vegetables should form the principle ingredients of any healthy and nutritious meal. Kitchen gardens both in rural and urban centres should be encouraged and supported by a planning policy.

vitamins and phytochemicals. These are useful plant based active substances. Vegetables can be used to quench thirst and provide all the nutrients during the hot months of the year. In far off Spain and the Mediterranean, a popular drink is the gazpacho, which has a base of tomato, pepper, cucumber, garlic and pure olive oil liquefied in a blender to a homogenised thick liquid. It is served