

Smoking burns up your life

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

Old habits, it's said, die hard. But sometimes it takes a change of such habits to improve one's health and to live longer. Smoking is one of them. The UK government's three-year one-billion-pound proposals on public health published in November are designed to promote "informed choice" on individual health. The paper proposes a ban on smoking in public enclosed places and television adverts on junk food and alcoholic drinks targeting children. Further, it proposes to cajole patients into healthier behaviour.

It claims the money saved will be "many times that spent on the campaign". This is because the world has finally realised the strong link between behaviour and health. For example, a decline in smoking in developed countries has significantly reduced deaths resulting from lung cancer and coronary heart disease over the past few decades.

The report, published in the November 2004 issue of *The Economist*, said Britons are becoming fatter. In 1980, 8 per cent of the women were obese compared to 24 per cent in 2001. The reports indicated a worrying trend for children – in 1996, 9.6 per cent of them, between 2-10 years, were obese compared to 15.5 per cent in 2002.

There will be an increase in expenditure on health and disease and a decrease in life expectancy if remedial action is not taken, and urgently so. And Kenyans appear headed in that direction.

By changing diet toward reducing fat, salt, sugar and roast meat to suitable levels, Ken-



yans will forestall expenditure on health in the present and future lives. Surprisingly, it is in the lower social classes that inequality is clearly visible even in our country. It is in this group that smoking is concentrated. It is not surprising to find a significant proportion of obese urban women among the bottom social classes.

Smoking is the most important preventable cause of illness and premature death in Western Europe and North America, according to studies. Our case is no different if we eliminate HIV/Aids and Malaria. Evidence that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer has been solid and unequivocal. Nicotine, a psychoactive drug that occurs naturally in tobacco, accounts for 95 per cent of the addiction-causing content of each cigarette smoked.

The most disastrous effect of nicotine is its addictive impact. Susceptibility of teenagers to perceived peer pressure and their tendency to experiment lures them into this



unhealthy habit. Adults smoke for relaxation or enhancing energy, depending on their emotional needs. Some do so for pleasure and as a way of dealing with anger or anxiety.

Smokers should take advantage of available professional help and ubiquitous anti-smoking campaigns and cessation clinics to beat the habit.

For those who must continue smoking, it is important to use diet to beat some of its long-term effects on health. A smoker's diet should be able to eliminate nicotine and other poisons from the body, repair the damage this causes as well as reduce the desire to smoke.

Water, abundantly consumed, can facilitate the elimination of nicotine and other toxins in the body through urine. Fruits provide important phytochemicals (plant-based substances) and anti-oxidant vitamins that neutralise some of the poisons in tobacco. They also increase urine production and eliminate waste products and toxins.

Vegetables are rich in minerals and vitamins. Carotenoids protect cells of the bronchial walls, while garlic and onions, which are rich in sulfurated essences, reduce the desire to smoke.

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