Strawberries boost immunity

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

Just like the 2004 Nobel Peace laureate's village, ours had clear streams and rivers whose banks were overgrown with wild shrubs and berries. It was unrestricted excitement to feed on these berries while grazing cattle and the boys would carry them along from the river.

That village herding is no more; today all farms are demarcated and boys no longer take cows to the river, as there are few to talk about. The remaining herds cannot even justify running cattle dips and they are zero-grazed. The bushes along riverbanks are no more as crop farming has taken up all available space. Berries for boys are non-existent.

Strawberries, commercially grown locally or imported, remain the only source of this "free" village life delicacy of yesteryears.

With the lowest calorific content of any fruit (30kcal/100gms), and with significant vitamin C, folates, potassium, iron, strawberries are a good source of dietary fibre.

The colour of strawberry comes from anthocyanidines, which are powerful antioxidants. A study at Boston University in 1996 by Hong Wang et al demonstrated that strawberries have the greatest antioxidant capacity of any fruit followed by plums, oranges and grapes. This activity was evaluated in terms of its ability to neutralise oxidising "free radicals".

Free radicals are molecules generated within the cells themselves as by-products of metabolic activity. These free radicals foster oxidation of (lipoproteins) fats, cause premature cell ageing, and promote caronogenic mutations. The body needs more antioxidants during stress, illness and when exposed to pollutants and during exercise. It is during these times that the body's defence system is at its lowest. The berries naturally stimulate the immune system of the body by eliminating these compounds (free radicals) that lower the body's defence. The effects make the consumption of strawberries particularly crucial to avoid arteriosclerosis or the deposition of cholesterol on artery walls, which thicken and become narrow. They promote artery health due to their richness in potassium and low fats and sodium.

They should be included in the diets of those who have suffered heart attacks and angina pectoris, especially when there has been poor circulation to the cerebral arteries or to the lower limbs.

The strawberries increase urine production and facilitate elimination of uric acid and are thus useful in gout and uratic arthritis. Because of their richness in soluble vegetable fibre, they help in the passage of faeces through the intestines and therefore decongest venous circulation in the veins of the bowel (portal system). Strawberries are thus useful in haemorrhoids and fluids in abdomen (ascites) and liver disorders (hepatitis or cirrhosis).

For those allergic to aspirin, strawberries should be taken cautiously as they contain salicylates and oxalic acid, which may expose one to the risk of calcium and oxalate renal stones.

Strawberries have been known to trigger the production of histamine, a primary chemical in allergies, in sensitive people.

Fresh strawberries go down very well with orange juice and yoghurt.

Stories about food well told can have great results. That is what good living is all about. We all need to change eating habits.

This Christmas boys in my village, tucked up on the slopes of the Aberdares, didn't enjoy berry shakes. We all drank from bottles where we mashed them with reeds.

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