

Edible rocks vital for diets

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

The Spaniards initially called them edible rocks: "Your Highness, this is the flower of a plant that can solve the dietary problems of the French people. From now on famine is impossible," said Antoine – Auguste in 1785 as he gave a bouquet of flowers to Francis King Louis XIV. This French pharmacist's words, more than two hundred years old, were said during the massive hunger of the French Revolution. Francisco Pizarro unloaded the first sack of potatoes from Peru in 1534. The plant had arrived too late.

Easy to grow, the potato has spread worldwide and has always had a place on the table. Humble, scorned and cheap, but always delicious and healthful, potatoes are essential dietary needs of today's world. Because the flowers of the potato were similar to the poisonous nightshade many people in Europe were afraid to eat the tubers.

The Agricultural research division of the department of agriculture of the USA declares that a diet based on whole milk and potatoes provides almost all the nutrients needed to maintain the human body. Quite complete as food, it provides high quality carbohydrates and proteins. It is only deficient in fats, provitamin A, vitamin E and B12. Everything else is well represented.

It contains 16.4 per cent carbohydrates of which 16 grams is starch and 0.4 grams glucose, fructose and saccharose. At 2 per cent protein of high biological value providing all the amino acids needed by the body in adequate proportion to foster growth, it is an ideal food. Its protein contains lysine, an amino acid deficient in grains. The proportion of protein at 10.3 per cent of total calories is close to ideal of 15



per cent recommended by nutritionists. It is a good source of vitamin C and little is lost during steaming but most is lost when fried. It is also rich in B complex vitamins.

Rich in potassium and low in sodium, it is appropriate for those with cardiovascular diseases and hypertension. Potatoes are poor in calcium but rich in iron, phosphorous and magnesium as well as zinc, manganese, copper and other trace elements. It has 1.6 per cent soluble vegetable fibre. Two medium sized potatoes (600 grams) contain almost 20 per cent of daily fibre needs. The potato is the stomach's best friend because of the sense of well being it creates due to at least three factors:

Antacid effects

They are relatively alkaline food capable of neutralising excess acid. This action is produced also in the blood and urine.

Physical consistency

The soft texture reduces the need for digestion effort in the stomach and provides relative rest.

Other ingredients

Investigations in Hoffman-la-Roche laboratories in Basle, Switzerland have found that potatoes contain small amounts of various benzodiazepines, sedative substances widely used in pharmaceuticals. These natural sedatives may act locally in the stomach, thus relaxing it.

Due to low fats and sodium they are ideal in arteriosclerosis. They alkalise the urine and blood aiding in elimination of toxic acids. They thus purify the blood. A potato diet is beneficial in metabolic acidosis and kidney stones.

For the obese, they are useful in causing a feeling of fullness and contain abundant B vitamins, which help metabolise carbohydrates. This refers to boiled and baked potatoes and not the fried potatoes.

A significant portion of potato's vitamins and mineral salts are concentrated just below the skin. The peel is not safe as it contains significant amounts of cadmium, a toxic metal similar to lead. A popular German remedy is raw potato juice, which is rich in alkalising substances. A few spoonfuls before a meal are sufficient to relieve acid stomach. (By adding spinach to compensate the lack of provitamin A and calcium, it is possible to have a nutritionally whole meal.) The potato is a necessity. Use it. Enjoy your 'edible rock'. Boiled, baked or roasted. Not fried.

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