

Keep diseases of the rich at bay

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

Ours is a country that has gone back to production. Soon, when the raw materials for industrial production are in place, we will make the transition slowly and surely from being an agrarian economy to an industrial society. Eating patterns and habits are going to change considerably. A burgeoning affluent class will be created, and more people will be looking upon Western diets as an improvement in standards of life, and sometimes health. But this is not always true.

Populations need to be educated, and re-educated into healthy eating and living habits that will minimise the risk of the so-called diseases of affluence. Consultations need to be initiated early between medical practitioners, health educators, food

producers, manufacturers and the central government to ensure the next generation is informed on the dangers of unhealthy habits. We need not fall into a developmental health trap and crisis.

Childhood obesity can be reduced or delayed if education is initiated early and children advised on what to avoid taking in excess at an early age. Consumption of animal fat and salt intake should be reduced and children counselled to take regular exercise.

Physical education should be reintroduced in schools as a compulsory subject. Children need to be counselled at school to avoid over-eating and taking up smoking. Studies have shown that there is a genetic propensity for parents who are obese to have overweight children. The influence of genetics has, however, not been fully explored. It was found that 77 per cent of young American soldiers killed during the



Korean War had some degree of artero-sclerosis – the thickening of blood vessels by fat deposits. This study showed that the origin of heart disease is usually well established before the third decade of life in Western societies. By counselling children at a tender age, we can avoid having to spend

money on them to treat heart attacks and hypertension. They will also grow up strong and healthy. Similarly, in a study done in a small group of exclusively breastfed infants, mothers were directed to alter their diet from meat and dairy products (high in fats) to legumes and vegetable oils (low in animal fats). A 15 per cent reduction in cholesterol levels was recorded in these infants. Mothers need to be advised to eat right.

A mother's diet impacts significantly on the health status of the newborn child. Breastfeeding mothers should be advised on the right food to take. Diabetes mellitus has been linked to being overweight and the intake of high calorific foods as well as lack of exercise. The incidence of this disease has been rising throughout the country, and is confined to the affluent middle class where it now represents a major public health concern.

In a study conducted on patients in Britain, 58 per cent of new cases of diabetes were linked to being overweight. The results, if a study were done in the Kenyan setting, would not be very different. Counselling has been shown to change the eating habits of patients. However, many patients have been shown to have difficulty in long term compliance if food selection and preparation for weight reduction and healthy diets are perceived as unappealing or inconvenient. This can be overcome by expanding the content of nutritional information, especially if this information is provided in a community-based programme as compared to a physician – patient clinical encounter.

In England and Wales, deaths from cancer of the large intestines (colon) was shown to have risen steadily over the past 30 years. In every case where there has been an increase in deaths, the possible theory to account for this has been diet. Popu-

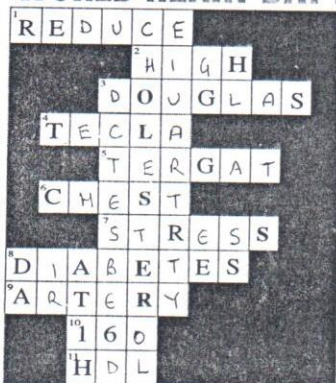
lation studies have shown that the more developed and affluent the society, the greater the incidence of colonic cancer. The low incidence of colonic cancer in rural African populations who subsist on a diet low in animal fat and high in fibre has been reported to contrast with much higher incidence of these cancers reported in urbanised folk. Independent studies have shown that a high proportion of fibre in diet – as is present in mukimo – seems to have the effect of protecting the large intestines against cancer.

People should be encouraged to eat a variety of foods, with emphasis on the consumption of whole grain products and cereals, vegetables and fruits. Adolescent girls, for example, and women should be encouraged to ensure adequate calcium and iron intake. Calcium intake in women is an important risk factor for bone mineral loss and menopausal weakness of bones (osteoporosis). It has been shown consistently by studies that many women and girls consume less than the daily allowance of calcium at 800mg a day in America.



Dr Karanja is a pharmacist based in Naivasha skaranjag@yahoo.com

WORLD HEART DAY 26.09.2004 QUIZ



HEALTHY EATING

To receive a **FREE Cholesterol Lowering Eating Plan**,

complete this quiz and send to **Dr. Cholesterol at Pfizer, P.O. Box 18244, Nairobi-00500**

enclosing a stamped envelope with your name & address on it.



CLUES (Across)

- Lowering high LDL Cholesterol can re- - - - - the risk of heart attack and death.
- - - - - LDL cholesterol is a risk factor in developing Coronary Heart Disease (CHD).
- - - - - Wakihuri was the first Kenyan to be a World Marathon Champion.
- First Kenyan female to win New York Marathon. What's Lorupe's first name?
- Re arrange "TARGET" to give name of Kenya's World Men's Marathon record holder.
- When blood flow to the heart is restricted, angina or - - - - - pain can result.
- Rearrange the word "TSESRS", which is common in modern living.
- Even slightly raised cholesterol levels in people with D_A_E_ES may lead to an increased risk of heart disease.
- Excess cholesterol leads to formation of plaque (a thick, hard deposit) on ar- - - - - wall. Name the blood vessel.
- Your LDL cholesterol level should be 16_ mg/ml or 4.2 mmol/L. If you have one or no CHD risk factor. Consult your doctor in any case.
- Short form for the 'good' cholesterol (NB: LDL = 'bad' cholesterol)

This Cardiovascular Quiz has been developed in the interest of the public health by Pfizer with best wishes to all Kenyans on the World Heart Day, 2004.

