

How to fortify your immunity ✓

Many deaths in the villages are caused by a compromised immune system. This trend needs to be stemmed using all available means. It may mean changing not just what we eat, but what we grow for the next season and the next generation. But the bottomline is restoration and preservation of the immune systems of our population, the cost notwithstanding.

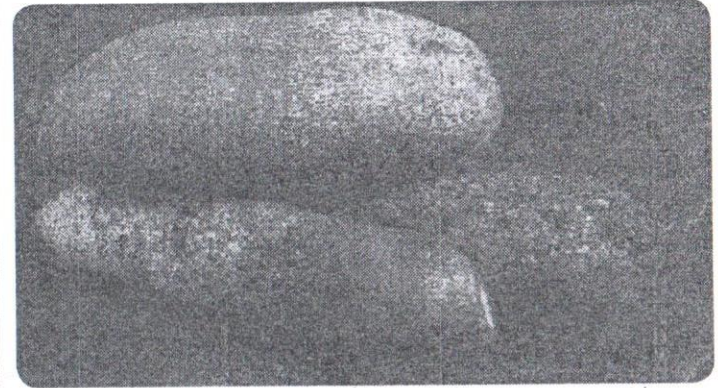
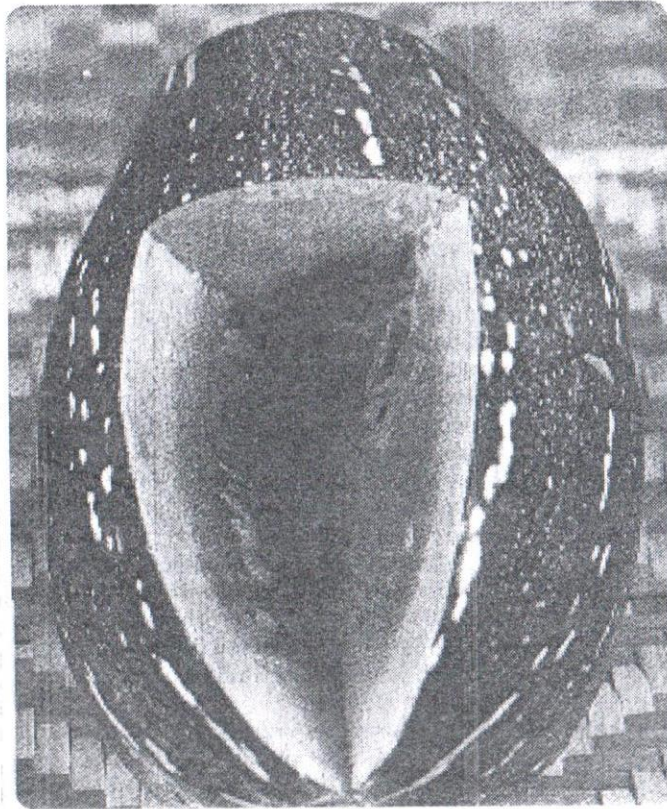
An active immune system plays a big role in preventing cancer. White blood cells are the "killer cells" in the body. When they identify a tumour cell they, together with other helper cells, attach themselves and kill the intruder.

The stability of the white blood cells is very important. The condition of the blood – its fluidity, viscosity, pH and nutrient levels is – vital for rapid deployment of these fighters to various parts of the body to tackle toxins, pathogens and threatening tumour cells.

These nutrients are vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and trace elements found in food. The speed of this deployment is dependent upon the condition of blood vessels. Arteriosclerosis, the lipids found in food are impeding conditions precipitated by the quality of diet, which can dampen such responses. Research shows that most foods grown locally are richly endowed with these sought after ingredients. Consider pumpkins, for instance. Their seeds are known to contain useful ingredients, for instance zinc, a trace element that delays the onset of full-blown HIV/Aids.

Pumpkin seeds also contain iron, phosphorus, potassium and magnesium. They are easily digested, rarely cause allergies and contain the b-carotene, an antioxidant that helps in preventing free radical damage to a body that has been ravaged by disease and has anti-helminthic properties.

Yam is a staple food that grows throughout the tropics. This tuber contains 50 per cent more protein and more than three



Pumpkin seeds contain iron, phosphorus, potassium and magnesium, while the yam contains large amounts of proteins.

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

times as much starch as the sweet potato. It is a good source of potassium, which is needed for muscle and nerve function. The yam, especially the yellow type, is a good source of b-carotene.

Selenium is an ingredient of food that has a significant impact on disease etiology, the branch of science that investigates the origins and causes of diseases. At 100 micrograms per day, it helps in improving the body immune functions. It also aids in

the formation of antibodies to fight against infections.

Stoewsand (1992) and Clarke (1996) reported that diets enriched with selenium gave protection against cancer of the breast and skin. Selenium is an antioxidant abundant in legumes and oil-bearing nuts, which are common items in traditional foods. The stresses of modern living, air and water pollution that were low a few decades ago increasingly justify the use of antioxidant-rich foods and fruits.

B-carotene, vitamin-C, vitamin-E – found in green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, nuts

and avocados – are all scavengers of free radicals.

When feeding immuno-suppressed patients, care should be taken to avoid foods that are likely to be sources of infectious pathogens. Salmonellosis, listeriosis and cholera are some of the possible food-based bacterial contaminants. Basic hygiene needs to be strictly observed.

Excess alcohol, nicotine, sugar and heavy metal contaminants like lead and cadmium should be avoided by these patients as it can adversely affect the immune functions. An immuno-suppressed patient has a poor appetite and any food is better than no food at all. Any exercise is better than none and they need to be encouraged to be physically active.

Access to qualified dieticians and health personnel is necessity for those who are infected to ensure necessary care and is appropriate and timely.

Never before in the history of humanity has the need to eat appropriately been so essential.