

With a good diet, ageing can be delayed

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

The pre- and post-independence Kenyan baby bubble is coming of age and fighting for recognition. It is also worrying about aging. White hair is rapidly appearing on the heads of many under their forties. As they race to make a kill and a name in business, the job market and in politics, many are becoming impatient as they notice their body begin to age.

Although you cannot avoid aging, a healthful lifestyle and diet is capable of slowing the onset of old age and degenerative diseases such as rheumatism, cataracts, cancer and arteriosclerosis.

One reason why our bodies age is the "biological clock" found in each body cell so that at a determined time, aging and death take place regardless of how healthy the diet or lifestyle is. Another reason we age is the presence of free radicals, which are electron-releasing molecules producing oxidation in the body. These free radicals attack body cells, damaging their chemical structure resulting in cellular degeneration, premature aging and producing diseases including cancers.

Free radicals are produced by the body itself as a result of metabolic processes that produce waste products that act as free radicals. The lungs, kidneys, liver and skin eliminate these free radicals. Accumulation of these compounds will cause aging in body cells. Free radicals can also come from external contamination in products like smoke, tobacco, drugs, pesticides and other contaminants, which damage the cells, accelerate the aging process and produce disease.

Nothing can be done to control the "biological clock" in each of our body cells. But there exists at least effective ways of fighting the causes of premature aging and disease:

Detoxification:

This can be done by promoting the body's detoxifying processes, such as increasing urine production, assisting detoxification of the liver, breathing correctly, avoiding constipation and perspiring occasionally through activities like exercise, sauna, steam baths and games.

Organic foods: By avoiding chemical and drug contamination as much as possible through the use of organically grown foods, as

well as avoiding tobacco and other unnecessary drugs like food additives.

Antioxidants: Consume antioxidants to avoid cancer, premature aging and degenerative disease.

Citrus fruits, strawberries, garlic, onions, celery and artichokes are the best foods to prevent premature aging.

Fruits, vegetables and oil-bearing nuts are the best sources of antioxidants. They are rich in B-Carotene, vitamin C and E. They are thus capable of neutralising the actions of free radicals generated by the body's metabolic activity and external contaminants, thus slowing the aging process. An example is squash, a variety similar to pumpkin that has had varied uses throughout history. The biblical Jonah found shade under the vine of a gourd to relieve his sunstroke. The Romans used it mixed with honey to aid digestion of the large amounts of meat they devoured in their orgies. In North America, pumpkins are carved with faces to make jack-o-lanterns at Halloween.

These plants contain the lowest of any foods in fat and sodium, but are rich in beta-carotene (pro-vitamin A), insoluble fibre and have hypotensive, diuretic, laxative and anti-carcinogenic properties. According to studies done in the International Life Sciences Institute in North America in 1990, a diet rich in potassium prevents arterial blood clots and stroke, while a sodium-rich diet promotes hypertension. It would be concluded that eating pumpkins could slow the aging process. A study done in Hyogo College in Japan showed that laboratory rats exposed to carcinogenic substances and then fed on yugao melon – a type of crook-necked pumpkin – presented half the number of cases of colon cancer than those that were given a normal diet. This experiment shows the capacity of certain plant-based foods such as pumpkin to neutralise carcinogens.

For the elderly, we need to add years to their lives and also life to their years by reducing the risk of disabling diseases such as cancer, heart attacks and rheumatism. This can be effectively achieved by ensuring that they consume healthy meals at all times. A healthy lifestyle and environment for these senior citizens is a must.

Natural and artificial weapons of mass destruction are posing a serious threat to humanity. Gains made in medicines will be reversed overnight in many areas if corrective measures are not taken. Man, it appears, has been put on notice by nature. And, the Kenyan baby bubble can age gracefully and not prematurely.

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