

# Exercise for your body's sake

**E**xercise, eat right and age gracefully like my grandmother who stands out in the village I grew up in on the slopes of Mt. Kenya. I'm sure she stands out in the whole country, too.

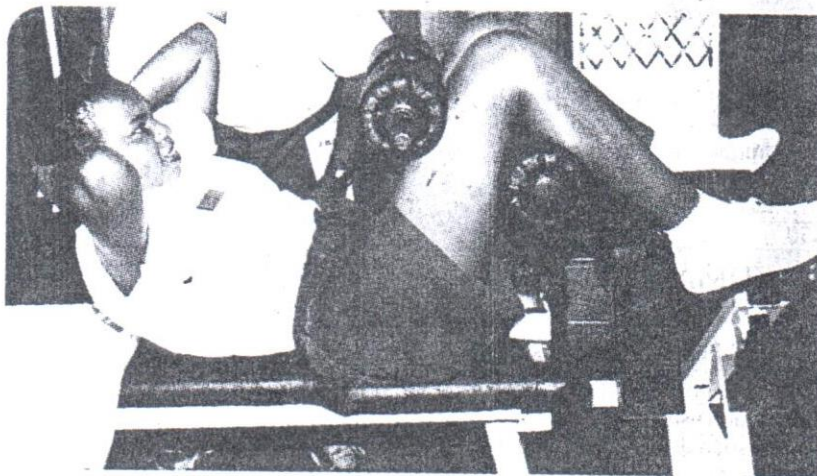
She has lived through the last century, witnessing monumental and sometimes shocking social, political and economic changes, but is still going strong. Her husband of meaty habits passed on a few years back at the ripe old age of 100. The secret to their long life? They ate right, a habit my grandmother maintains to date.

To a very large extent, our choice of food determines how healthy our bodies stay. Wrong food choices mean ill health. To the young and energetic, this may seem trivial. However, what you put into your system in your youth determines how you cope in subsequent years. Each decade brings with it a set of possible health concerns.

So you survived puberty, and went on to enjoy the next three decades of good health effortlessly. You are now approaching fifty and things are beginning to appear a little tricky as age slowly remodels everything from your bones to your brain cells.

Even as you hit 40, the muscle tone you took for granted in your 20's and 30's becomes an elusive dream. If you relied on walking and swimming to stay fit, consider lifting weights to keep you lean and strong and help you modulate blood pressure and cholesterol.

Being over 50 means your virility has been significantly reduced. You now experience less forceful releases and less rigidity. The good news is that this needs not be so. Impotence is not a sign of normal aging as it is associated with impaired blood flow to and from vital body organs. Thus anything that preserves your cardiovascular health can promote your



## GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

vital performance as well. By maintaining healthy eating habits, blood flow into that all-important body part need not be affected. Exercise also helps, so does maintaining a normal body weight.

Your enamel too becomes more prone to cracks as you age. The gums may recede and old fillings may disintegrate inviting tooth decay. This is not to be taken lightly as poor nutrition is a leading cause of oral problems among the elderly. Loss of teeth can also be caused by poor dental hygiene and can be stemmed by regular visits to the dentist.

Around 55, proteins in your lung tissue become less elastic. This change, combined with a gradual stiffening of the chest wall diminishes the lungs' ability to shuttle oxygen to the veins as you breathe. It is vital to take up a sport – tennis or swimming and to quit smoking. Elderly people who are fit often have greater lung capacity than young persons who are

sedentary. It is not for nothing that many people retire into less congested and polluted towns as this greatly helps to improve the health of the lungs. In this case east or west, village is best.

The walls of the ear canal grow thinner and drier over time and nerves and sensory cells die. Nearly 40 percent of people over 65 years have hearing problems. Although some degree of hearing loss cannot be avoided, avoid exposure to loud noise, which can damage hearing. However, to combat this problem, small, inconspicuous and very effective hearing aids have been developed. The need to live a quiet life in old age cannot be overemphasized.

The brain is not left behind in the ageing process. Scientific research shows that this organ shrinks by 10 percent between the ages of 30-90 years, with neurons becoming less dense. Although its processing ability may wane, attention spans and language skills should not suffer.

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