

Fight Aids with good nutrition

The estimated death toll of the HIV/Aids scourge in Africa in the next few years is expected to surpass the Black Death, the devastating plague that struck Europe in the late 14th century.

This bubonic plague and its virulent relative, pneumonic plague, which struck a Europe that was completely helpless in the absence of natural immunity and lack of personal hygiene, almost decimated small towns. Recurrent infections prevented rise in populations even though there were increased marriages and births after the epidemic. Death of the clergy denied many people spiritual guidance in times of a crisis. Understaffed churches and recruitment of lay and un-informed priests caused a moral crisis and disillusionment of the people with the church.

The death of workers created labour shortages and a rise in wages and rural desolation impoverished many.

Aids which produces a decline in immune response to infections and cancer is caused by a virus that

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

attacks and destroys the body's lymphocytes (defence cells).

Anti-oxidant vitamins A, C and E are necessary in the diet to prevent the development of the disease, according to a 1996 study by Liang B titled *Immunology and Immunomodulation in Aids*, which was reported in Nutrition magazine.

These vitamins are found in fruits, vegetables, grains and nuts. Aids patients tend to be malnourished, a condition that aggravates weakness in the immune system. Factors leading to malnourishment include frequent infections that result from reduced resistance and inability to assimilate fats eliminated through the faeces. The faeces appear foamy and greasy (steatorrhoea). This digestive disorder, present in about one-fourth of Aids patients, also prevents ab-

sorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D and E.

The anti-Aids medication usually produce side effects such as nausea and vomiting, further aggravating malnourishment.

The role of nutrition in improving resistance and slowing progression of Aids cannot be over-emphasised. Anything weakening the immune system must be avoided in diet. Anti-oxidants, which increase resistance such as B-carotene, vitamin C and E, selenium and flavonoids are the most potent and are found exclusively in plant-based foods. Fruits not only provide these antioxidant vitamins, but also help eliminate waste materials and free radicals that increase as a result of infection. Nuts are good sources of vitamin E, proteins, and trace elements such as selenium and zinc, which are nutrients essential in strengthening the immune system as well slowing down HIV's progress.

Vitamins B6 and B12 deficiency worsens immune dysfunction, according to a study in 1995 by Karter D.L. Low levels of vitamin B12 in the blood reduce defence cells and worsens the disease. Administration of vitamins B12 supplements is advisable.

Yoghurt, which contains live bacterial cultures, improves the condition of the bacterial flora of the colon and stimulates the body's natural resistance. It is also a good source of proteins and calcium. Selenium, a trace element required by the body's antioxidant enzymes and strengthens resistance and positively affects the course of Aids, has been shown to be useful.



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