

# Eating well leads to better nerve development ✓

## GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

**A**s eating healthy takes centre stage, soon restaurants will be catering for clientele depending on their medical condition.

Eating healthy meals is no longer taken for granted and many countries are constantly reassessing their agricultural products depending on health needs of their people.

Already there are restaurants selling vegetarian food for non-meat eaters. For instance the vegetable burger will consist of two onions, a tomato, two carrots, one clove of garlic, one courgette, some oats, nuts, sprinkled with potherbs and wrapped with homemade whole grain buns suitable for a mid-morning brunch with chocolate or lemon leaves for beverage.

There are also parents who are benefiting from their children teaching them on healthy lifestyle while others implement changes after reading a column like this one among others. Nutrition classes are a must in the current situation and they need to be taught early in life.

A study by Oxford University department of Physiology published in the latest issue of US journal on Paediatrics found that under-achieving British children's reading and spelling abilities were dramatically improved when their diets were supplemented with fish oils containing omega-3-fatty acids essential for brain development but missing from modern processed foods. Surprisingly, most parents are waking up to the realisation that poor diets are making children angrier, fatter, and less able to learn.

A mother's pre-natal, antenatal and post-natal nutrition is important for the eventual development of a healthy baby. Infants' proper nutrition is equally important and any deficiencies manifest themselves and result



in stunted growth.

Within medical circles, it is understood that infant mortality is mainly as a result of genetics, infections and nutrition. Combine these factors and the results don't just add up, they multiply. Though children in hospitals may receive medication to counter infections, going home to poor and improper diets does

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not assure survival. This puts unnecessary strain on health facilities as well as human and material resources by constant hospital revisits. Suitable early nutrition to these children optimises their mental health at infancy, through childhood and eventually through adulthood.

The nervous system comprising the brain, and the spinal cord develop early in childhood. Since this is the system that controls and directs all organs of the body including those responsible for thought and memory, and signals from here determine all other responses, one needs to consume food that will improve, and enhance its performance. Blindness, deafness, tremors, depression and intellectual stress are just some of the conditions from a poorly developed nervous system.

Vitamin B is the group with the most significant contribution to the stability and development of the nervous system. Surpris-

ingly this vitamin group is readily available in most of the food items grown locally.

For instance, cashewnuts are the most highly prized globally for their richness in unsaturated fatty acids such as oleic and linoleic acids in vitamins b1 and b2, pantothenic acid in minerals such as magnesium, potassium, iron and phosphorus. Cashewnuts are noted for high magnesium content surpassing milk, meat, eggs and even sunflower seeds. All these are important for nervous stability and their lack especially of magnesium produces irritability, depression, weakness, abnormal tiredness and spasms in hollow organs such as the colon (irritable bowels), the uterus (dysmenorrhoea) or coronary arteries (heart attack).

Most of the intellectual human capital useful in turning around the continent's programmes need to be concentrated on food rich on vitamin B such as mangoes, cherimoya (matomoko), chicken peas, avocados and whole wheat with the germ:

In an effort to improve ecology, encourage economic prosperity and increase long term welfare of rural persons, programmes of converting cropland to forests with fruit and nut trees need to be undertaken with earnest zeal.

This will ensure an adequate supply of B-group of vitamins for the population. Farmers in wastelands and barren mountains can be compensated with grains, cash and seedlings effectively bringing many hectares of land under economic trees by the end of this decade.

Walnuts, macadamias, avocados and cashewnuts should receive farmers' attention due to their easy management. A head start on this will make our country the envy of many in a few years by being world-class exporters of nuts and effectively stabilise global nerves that are currently on ends — literally.

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