

Sweet side of the bitter lemon

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

James Cook, the famous first European seaman to visit Hawaii islands and New Zealand, made his sailors carry lemons during their journey. The seaman's instinct told him that in the lemon lay a healer of scurvy, as during his time vitamins had not been discovered. He was right. His sailors endured the harshness of the oceanic journeys with more strength than others. The British Navy also owe their early success to the lemon.

In 1928, ascorbic acid was isolated by a Hungarian chemist. It was called Vitamin C, a discovery that was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1937.

The lemon is a synonym for health and the most important property in it is Vitamin C. Although there are other vegetables with a higher concentration of Vitamin C than the lemon, its anti-scurvy effect is very strong because of its balanced composition of organic acids and mineral salts.

The lemon stimulates digestive organs and has a revitalising effect on the whole body. Although it has an acid flavour, chemically it behaves as a buffer and is able to neutralise excess alkaline acids. It helps in reducing stomach acidity and aids digestion.

The lemon alkalises the whole body and suits people with protein or meat rich diets, which produce excess acidity as uric acid. It is thus recommended for those suffering from gout, arthritis and generally those who want to improve their health. Citric acid salts in the lemon, especially potassium citrate, prevent the formation of kidney stones and ease their dissolution. Kidney stones are usually of urate oxalate stones. This property makes lemon juice true medicine.

Flavonoids in lemon reinforce the stability of the capillary vessels and improves venous blood flow. It is useful in cases of swollen legs, oedema, and varicose veins and is recommended for those suffering from high blood pressure.

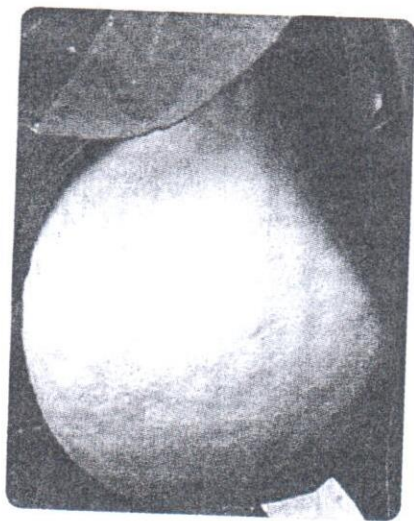
As an antiseptic directly applied on the tonsil or into the inside of the nose, by means of a soaked cotton cloth, the lemon can help in killing some germs. The cholera epidemic of 1855 in Venezuela was resolved by means of a massive consumption of lemons by the affected population.

Lemon juice is useful against sore throat and is usually helpful on many skin ulcerations and wounds when the doctor is unavailable.

On the skin, it soothes and hydrates the skin, strengthens weak nails, diminishes dandruff and gives brightness to the hair.

The best way to enjoy and take advantage of the medicinal properties of the lemon, lime and other citric juice is to consume them just after they have been squeezed from the fruit.

A lemon cure must be administered under medical supervision because it is a true



medical treatment. It has side effects, though, and should be avoided by those suffering from kidney insufficiency, anaemic children and the elderly.

To get good results, dissolve the lemon juice in water and drink half an hour before breakfast. Use every day until you reach seven or nine lemons daily. Then reduce the dosage according to the same rhythm to only one. Stop for a week and repeat the process if needed. It renders good results in cases of gout, arthritis and kidney stones.

The leaves and rind of the lemon are rich in aromatic essence. They have antispasmodic (reduce stomach cramps) qualities and the lemon is recommended for people suffering from poor appetite and poor functioning of the stomach.

Lemon infusion is made by mashing the rind in a glass of water and infusing for some minutes. Drink three cups daily, sweetened with honey.

Lemon juice contains Vitamins B1, B2 and C, potassium, mineral salts, trace elements, sugar, mucilage, organic acids and flavonoids.

We all have at one time or another taken lemon against fever. After washing two good lemons, cut them into small pieces and put them into a blender with some water. Once well ground, add four spoonfuls of honey and water to two litres. The liquid must be strained and discretionally drunk during the whole day.

With this whole lemon juice, including both flesh and peel, a notable anti-fever effect is achieved especially for colds and influenza.

The practice of dressing vegetables and legumes with lemon is doubly beneficial since it aids the assimilation of iron from the foods and reduces the need for salt to bring out flavours. It is therefore important to eat *githeri*, *mukimo* and *kima* with a lemon dressing to enhance their nutritive value.

The pectin, a soluble fibre in the pulp and white inner peel, prevents metastasis of prostate cancer in laboratory rats, according to a study in 1995 reported in the journal of national Cancer institute of the US. It is highly likely that it has similar effects in human beings not only on prostate cancer, but on other types of cancers as well.

A study in 1994 showed evidence of inhibition of nitroso compound formation as a factor in the negative correlation between Vitamin C consumption and the incidence of certain types of cancers. These nitrosamines are formed in cured meat. Our *nyama choma* culturalists can benefit by adding lemon in their *kachumbari* that accompany such feasting.



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