

Put the brakes on ageing

Ageing is inevitable but no one would object to living a few years longer if only the added period is spent in good health. Old age comes with its own set of problems, which are related to the lifestyle we had in the earlier years. A sensible approach to both diet and lifestyle can actually slow down the ageing process.

Elderly persons have difficulties in chewing, digestion, absorption and their senses of smell and taste get blunted. There is no concomitant decrease in the need for nutrients for tissue repair and regeneration. In fact, ageing increases the demand for vitamins and minerals. A plant-food-based diet can lengthen your life by reducing disabling diseases such as cancer, heart attack and stroke.

The effects of long-term bad habits such as smoking starts to manifest themselves as age catches up with you and if continued into old age, these activities sap the body's energy and nutrient reserves. Old persons living alone have problems preparing nutritious meals and lack the knowledge of what their bodies lack. This causes myriad health complications, which ultimately reduce both the quality and quantity of years one lives. Old people's homes may be a way out of this quagmire of loneliness and unhealthy feeding.

If we lengthen middle age by slowing down aging, it may translate into a shortened old age with an increased demand for services from

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

a really aged population.

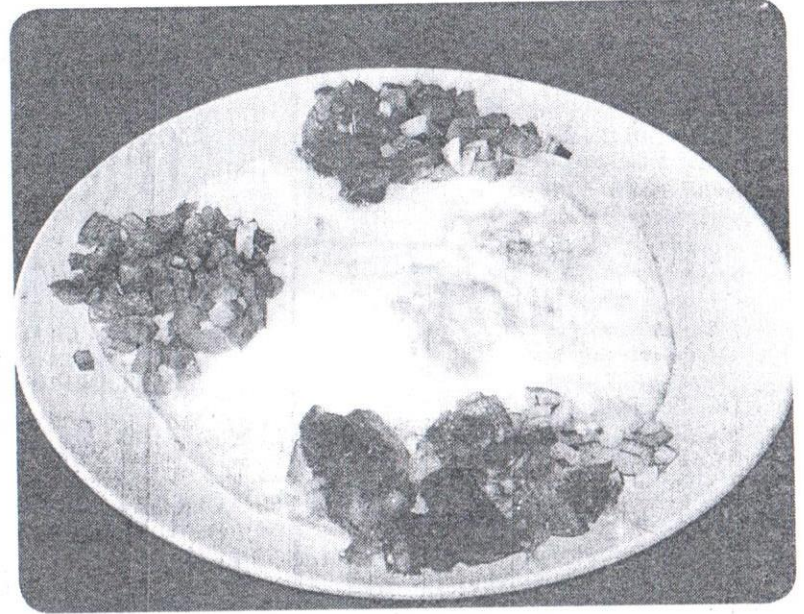
A good diet with sufficient supply of minerals and vitamins is absolutely essential for this group. Vitamin B-12 whose replenishment has been known to reverse memory loss and lapses are plentiful in fish, pork, eggs, offal (kidneys and liver) and milk.

My grandfather, a man of meaty habits, really cherished small intestines from bush-reared sheep and goats. Elderly persons naturally tend to keep forgetting things like dates, names and places.

Elderly people can sometimes have limited exposure to sunlight due to physical incapacity and may need vitamin D, which is available in fish oil, liver, eggs whole milk and butter.

By partaking alcohol and smoking, the body nutrients stores are depleted, leading to an increase in free radicals. Nuts, vegetables and fruits contain important vitamins and anti-oxidants that help mop up free radicals.

A study done by Dr Hellerstein and colleagues at the Berkley University, California, showed that feeding one day and starving the next is how many animals tend to feed in the wild due to uncertain food supply. Cycles of drought and bumper harvest tend to allow them to restrict food intake. This, it was observed,



reduced cell division during periods of scarcity and, according to the study done on mice, it extended the lifespan of the animals. Theory has it that this pattern of feeding may stymie the development of cancerous cells by denying them resources that they need to grow and proliferate.

Whether this theory can be extended to humans to elongate lifespan requires further investigations, but life in the rural areas sometimes revolves around periods of lack and plenty. This uncertain food supply means that we go through even and uneven food availability cycles. The study, published in the American Journal of Physiology and

Endocrinology, suggests significant gains in longevity may be made by a mere 5 per cent reduction in calories intake. Modern man is constantly surrounded with food and foregoing eating every other day to cut a few calories may be easier than making small reductions every day.

Fasting may a necessary way of cleansing the body and increasing lifespan, especially for a generation that has groped in the dark with the HIV/Aids scourge and natural disasters including the recent tsunami in Asia.

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