

# Did you know that Bananas are lifesavers

My generation grew up being fed on pre-digested bananas from our mothers' mouths and my aging grandmother belongs to a generation that spent the better part of the 1960s and 70s selling them at the local market when they were still strong.

The plant grows in my village and is an ideal diet, especially when raw.

The banana is the most consumed fruit in the world after the apple. Eaten without the need for a knife or napkin, the bananas are served in five continents and come even in its own natural hygienic packaging (the peel), which protects it from contamination. More than anything it is the most nutritious and medicinal fruit that exists.

Ripe bananas are made up primarily of starch (21 per cent). When they ripen this starch converts to sugars as sucrose, glucose and fructose and only one per cent starch remains.

Low in protein (at only one per cent) and very little fat, bananas stand out for their vitamin B6 component. Three medium-sized bananas provide the recommended daily allowance of the vitamin for an adult male. They too have significant amounts of vitamin C, B1, B2 and E as well as folate. They are rich in minerals, potassium, magnesium and iron. Only avocado and dates surpass banana on potassium.

Both soluble and insoluble vegetable fibres are present in significant amounts, which helps in lowering lipids and cholesterol. Serotonin in small amounts found in the banana,

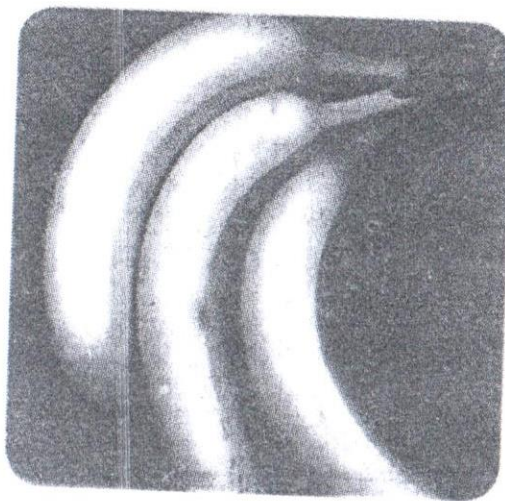
which is a derivative from amino acid tryptophan, performs various functions in the nervous system such as arterial vasodilation, sedation of nerves and inhibition of pain in the spinal cord.

The presence of significant amounts of vitamins B necessary for energy production within the heart muscle as well as magnesium, which inhibits the process of arteriosclerosis and prevents heart attack, make the banana an ideal fruit. Rich in potassium and low in sodium, it is crucial in preventing arterial hypertension, arrhythmia and stroke.

Bananas, eaten with apples or just alone, are effective in relieving diarrhoea. Those with poor intestinal absorption problems accompanied by diarrhoea as in celiac disease can benefit from a banana only diet for some days especially when taken with rice or corn.

In gout and arthritis, bananas alkalise the blood, helping in the elimination of excess uric acid.

When low sodium diet is recommended, especially in cirrhosis (liver damage), ascites (abdominal swelling) and oedema,



## GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

bananas are the ideal diet.

They are not contra-indicated for diabetics although they should be controlled because of their carbohydrates. The sugars in the banana are absorbed slowly and do not produce a sharp rise in blood glucose levels.

Individuals taking medications or arterial hypertension need a greater supply of potassium, which may be obtained from bananas. Two large bananas provide one gram of potassium, a daily amount that more than meets the need for individuals under medical treatment.

They also help avoid hypertension and maintain a healthy heart. A word of caution however: a study showed that the heart is affected by excessive amounts of serotonin. Endomyocardial Fibrosis – a disease of heart muscle – has been reported to be prevalent amongst Nigerians eating large quantities of Serotonin-rich bananas.

The banana is eaten raw. Those ripened on the tree and not in chambers have more sugar and vitamins.

The digestion of the banana begins in the mouth. Its starch component is difficult to digest and can produce flatulence. Proper digestion is facilitated by chewing the banana well to mix it with saliva. See why my mother's generation had to chew roasted bananas for the toddlers? Hats off to them.

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