

Children develop tastes fairly early and tend to eat what the adults around them cherish.

More than six billion people are estimated to be overweight due to lifestyle and dietary changes taking place globally. This imbalance between calories taken in and those utilised is increasingly becoming a medical problem that has warranted attention by the World Health Organisation (WHO). That it has taken a global dimension means we have to address it early here before it takes root.

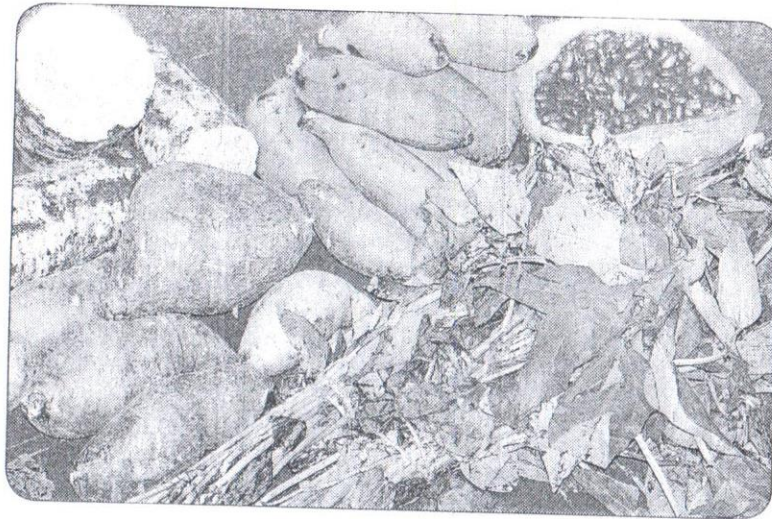
Acting proactively to stem its spread especially to the poor in our midst will avoid disabling health consequences such as diabetes, hypertension, cancers, and heart disease. The problem is so widespread and threatening that the WHO has declared it a global epidemic. That people are leapfrogging from adversity to prosperity in little less than a generation has significant health, wealth and fertility consequences.

Plenty of locally grown foodstuffs like sweet potatoes, arrowroots, cherimoya, cucumbers and legumes taken in quantities sufficient to supply the body with nutrients and prepared in traditional ways are useful in combating obesity.

Eating homemade meals and insisting on well-prepared restaurant foods are ways of stemming the tendency towards overweight. Players in the food industry must re-position themselves to serve healthy meals.

Children develop tastes fairly early and tend to eat what the adults around them cherish. A parent who enjoys fermented porridge is likely to influence similar tastes to his offspring as compared to one who has no appetite for it.

A study done by Golay A and colleagues at the University of Geneva, Switzerland in 1996 and published



The world has a weighty problem

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

in the American journal of clinical nutrition showed that reducing calorific intake greatly reduces body weight.

Maintaining a balanced proportion of sources of calories to the three main food energy sources at fats (17 per cent), complex carbohydrates (75 per cent); and protein (15 per cent) avoids metabolic imbalances seen when one major food item is eliminated. Such a balanced system

can be used for long periods with no ill effects and its effect in weight control is long lasting. No wonder in the rural areas meat was only used in family meals and not taken alone as is done in roast meat eating sprees today.

Oils, oil-bearing nuts and dried fruits eaten in small amounts are healthy. Despite being high in energy, they contain useful ingredients such as oil soluble vitamins.

By eating foods that supply few calories in proportion to their weights such as fruits and vegetables, one reduces the incidence and occurrence of obesity and there is

improved health. Dietary habits like eating slowly and chewing carefully have been shown to reduce the amount and quantity of food eaten. Anxiety and worry especially at mealtimes and eating between meals has been shown to lead to greater consumption of food. One needs to avoid eating in a hurry.

Making breakfast and lunch the main meals in a day and eliminating heavy dinners — reducing them to salads and fruits — has been found to significantly improve productivity, reduce stress at work and contribute to greater utilisation of energy during the day thus reducing obesity.

A study at the school of pharmacy at Universidad Complutense of Madrid (Spain) in 1996 showed that those who eat little or no breakfast are more likely to be obese.

The number of calories and their source is important in weight loss diets as equal amounts from complex carbohydrates, vegetables, legumes and fruits are less fattening than from sweets and sugary products. Eating foods that reduce fluid retention — low in sodium — and those that alkalise the body has been shown to greatly reduce body weight.

Now is the time to hold schools accountable for the health of students by banning junk food. Lunch programmers that take into consideration the calorific distribution of food sources and their levels need to be introduced to ensure children grow up healthy.

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