



Today the world commemorates World Hepatitis Day. The day focuses on increasing awareness about hepatitis, to eliminate the disease by 2030 as per the World Health Organisation targets. NewVision has been publishing a series of articles on the condition. Today, Lillian N. Magezi explores the best diet for people living with Hepatitis B infection

When Monica was diagnosed with Hepatitis B, the doctor asked her to do several other tests. She did the tests and the doctor told her that she would not need to take any medicine for the condition.

However, the doctor advised her to take good care of herself, to prevent other infections that would overwhelm her immune system and cause her bad health. She was told to always sleep under an insecticide-treated mosquito net and have protected sex. In addition to informing her boyfriend about her status, Monica was advised to tell him to get tested for Hepatitis B and vaccinated if he was negative.

The doctor also advised her to be careful with what she ate. He explained that since the Hepatitis B virus caused degeneration of the liver, she should avoid consuming anything that would overwhelm her liver and complicate her condition.

Therefore, the doctor advised her not to take alcohol and not to self-medicate with any drugs or food supplements. She was also advised to limit the consumption of oily and processed foods such as cakes, sausages and ice cream. She was told to have lots of fruits and vegetables.

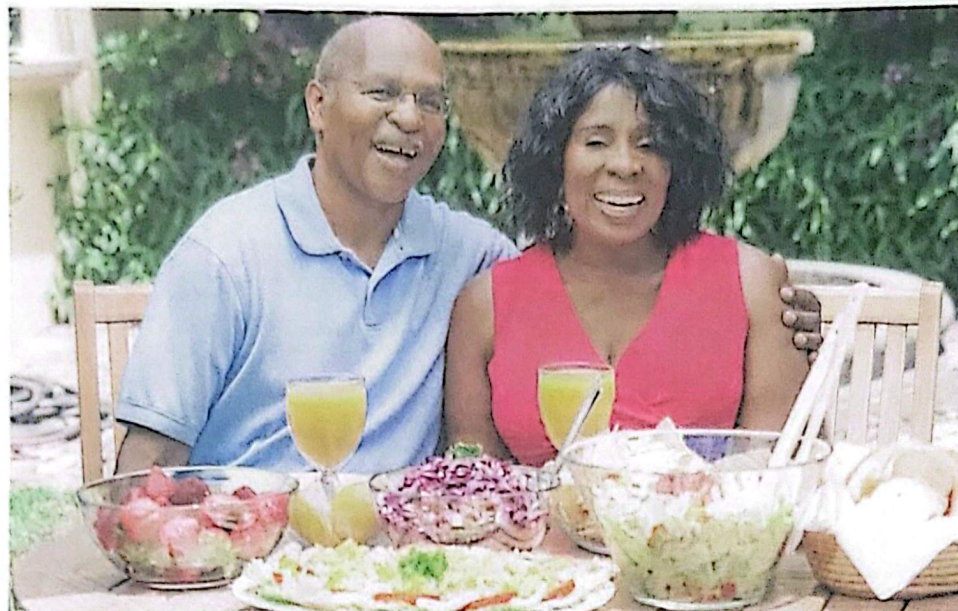
Hepatitis B and nutrition

Hepatitis viruses affect the normal functioning of the liver, resulting in numerous metabolic problems, notes Lilian Nakayiki Nyanzi, a nutritionist at JARO Hospital in Namugongo in Kampala. The liver is a large, meaty organ that sits on the right side of the abdomen. Its main function is to filter blood coming from the digestive tract, before passing it to the rest of the body. The liver also detoxifies chemicals and metabolises drugs.

Nyanzi notes that when the normal functioning of the liver is affected, it hinders absorption and assimilation of major nutrients in the body, which could result into nutrient malabsorption and deficiencies.

Hepatitis B patients may present with nausea, vomiting, lack of appetite, jaundice, dark urine, fevers and weight loss. It also manifests through protein, energy, vitamins and mineral deficiencies. A poorly treated Hepatitis B infection can lead to liver cirrhosis and eventually liver cancer.

Some people with Hepatitis B are treated with antiviral



People with Hepatitis should eat a lot of fruits and vegetables to support the liver in its detoxifying role

Diet for people living with Hepatitis B virus

Alcohol is processed in the liver; it can further damage it and interfere with the effectiveness of drugs that target the hepatitis virus.

drugs, while others do not need them. Nyanzi advises that proper nutrition and adherence to drugs (for those on treatment) is necessary in promoting good health and slowing the progression of the disease.

Other tips on feeding

Andrew Sekitooleko, a clinical nutritionist at Mulago Hospital notes that inadequate food intake is one of the major causes of malnutrition and occurs in about two thirds of the patients with chronic hepatitis and other liver diseases. This is mainly attributed to loss of appetite. Nyanzi advises those with nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite, to eat small frequent meals instead of three major meals.

Avoid self-medication with any drugs or taking mineral and vitamin food supplements without first contacting your doctor.

FEEDING FOR A PERSON WITH HEPATITIS B

Limit carbohydrates

Nyanzi notes that it is crucial to remember that whatever one eats is always converted into calories/ energy. She adds that for someone who has Hepatitis B, it is important to limit excess consumption of calories. Therefore, such individuals should focus on eating foods that are low in energy/calories, but highly nutritious. Such foods include whole grains and cereals, such as oats and brown rice, in addition to fresh fruits and

green leafy vegetables.

Nyanzi explains that excess calorie intake will consequently result into malabsorption and digestion of fat because the liver cannot produce enough bile salt. This results into fat deposition around the liver leading to a fatty liver, excessive weight gain and heart diseases.

Fruits and vegetables

Nyanzi notes that an individual with Hepatitis B should eat lots of fruits and vegetables because they are a rich source of vitamins and

minerals. In addition, fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants that fight against the free radicals (cancerous cells) in the body, hence promoting health. She notes Hepatitis B affects the normal functioning of the liver, resulting in the accumulation of oxidants in the body that could cause cancer. Therefore, Nyanzi notes that it is important for people with Hepatitis B to consume foods rich in antioxidants so as to support the liver in detoxifying blood.

Limit proteins

People diagnosed with Hepatitis B are advised to control their protein intake and Nyanzi advises such people to contact a nutritionist to calculate for them how much protein they should consume per day. She explains that controlling protein intake is aimed at preventing malnutrition as well as avoid hepatic encephalopathy.

Nyanzi describes hepatic encephalopathy as a state of mental confusion due to

FACT FILE

Viral hepatitis is a group of infectious diseases and the five known hepatitis viruses are types A, B, C, D and E. According to WHO, the virus causes acute and chronic liver disease and leads to the death of about 1.4 million people every year worldwide, mostly from Hepatitis B and C.

Hepatitis B puts people at a risk of death from cirrhosis (liver damage) and liver cancer.

When a person is first infected with the Hepatitis B virus, it is called an "acute infection" (for a new infection). While some adults are able to get rid of the virus, others are unable to do so and after six months, they are diagnosed, as having a "chronic infection".

presence of more protein than what the liver can use. This eventually builds up toxins that interfere with the function of the brain. This explains the need to feed the individual on a protein-controlled diet to treat and prevent adverse effects.

Andrew Sekitooleko, a clinical nutritionist at Mulago Hospital, advises that one should ensure that their proteins mainly come from plant sources, such as beans, peas and groundnuts or lean protein, such as fish, skinless chicken and egg white.

Low fat diet

Sekitooleko also recommends a low fat diet and, if one is to use oil, they should opt for mainly essential oils, such as olive oil, borage oil, evening primrose oil or flax seed oil. He advises patients against consuming solid fats such as margarine or fried and junk foods. Healthy fats can also be found in nuts and avocados. One should also take low-fat dairy products, such as skimmed milk and not full cream milk.

Avoid alcohol

Nyanzi and Sekitooleko advise whoever is living with Hepatitis B to stop taking alcohol. They explain that since alcohol is processed in the liver, it can further damage the organ. It can also interfere with the effectiveness of drugs for the condition.

In addition, Sekitooleko advises patients to avoid sugary processed drinks and caffeinated drinks and opt for water instead.