

AGE GRACEFULLY



Older persons in a fitness drill at the labour ministry offices after participating in a healthy walk on Friday

Manage your weight to beat obesity in old age

AGNES KYOTALENGERIRE

At the age of 70, Thereza Mukisa weighs over 100kg. Mukisa's weight does not permit her to do anything. She is literary immobile and, every morning, she stations herself on the verandah, where all the things she needs to use are brought to her by her eight-year-old granddaughter.

But this kind of sedentary lifestyle has taken a toll on Mukisa's health. She complains about ailments, such as diabetes, hypertension and knee joint pains.

DANGERS OF OBESITY

Experts say obesity in old age is associated with increased morbidity and a reduction in quality of life. Being overweight exposes people to diabetes and hypertension. When not controlled, one risks coronary heart diseases and, sometimes, the situation predisposes one to fractures.

Socially, stigma may lead to depression. These are effects that are not desired because, even in old age, one needs to be healthy and happy.

Peterson Kato Kikomeko, an assistant lecturer of human nutrition and dietetics department at Kyambogo University, explains that as one grows older, there is a tendency for the body system to slow down.

This is worsened by less activity, coupled with unhealthy eating habits. Consequently, associated health complications, such as diabetes and hypertension, begin to crop up.

CHANGE OF LIFESTYLE

Kikomeko says lifestyle change is the way to go. He advises one to start doing a quick assessment of one's lifestyle, looking out for the likely causes. Is it sedentary lifestyle or eating fatty unhealthy foods?

To manage weight effectively, one's diet should be combined with a moderate exercise programme to preserve muscle mass, as dieting results in loss of muscle, as well as fat," Kikomeko explains.

He says achieving desired results in old age would depend on how one prepares one's body in the earlier years.

"If you have not been physically active in your early years, do not expect to have a strong body and muscles in old age. Nutritionally, if you have not been feeding as recommended or engaged in poor dietary habits in your earlier years, the body does not have the reserve to function normally in the later years."

HOW TO PREVENT OBESITY IN YOUNG PEOPLE

There is a link between the nutrition wellbeing of the mother during pregnancy and weight gain of a child through out life.

Kikomeko says if a mother is obese during pregnancy, there is a likelihood the baby will grow up overweight, depending on the conditions.

But even when one is not yet overweight, one can prevent the condition by managing one's weight through regular exercise and being mindful of what one eats.

Kikomeko advises mothers to go slow on refined foods, especially those containing sugar because they bring in unnecessary calories.

The transition from adolescents to early adulthood is marked by many social, economic changes. Because of the economic changes, for example, by people earning money, they start consuming alcohol and eating much fatty and sugary foods, which predisposes them to weight gain and poor lifestyle-related diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension.

Kikomeko advises eating healthy foods with lots of fruits and vegetables, drinking plenty of water; about eight glasses per day and consuming alcohol in moderation.

DO PLENTY OF PHYSICAL EXERCISES

Exercises help us to keep physically fit, as well as burn off extra calories in the body, thus contributing to healthier living. However, one needs to think outside the box and come up with physical exercises which do not require money.

Kikomeko says engaging in a 30-minute exercise will make one sweat. These exercises are cycling, skipping a rope, dancing, playing football and netball or swimming.

If one is physically active and ensures healthy diets, they are less likely to gain excessive weight and less susceptible to poor lifestyle-related diseases, says Kikomeko.