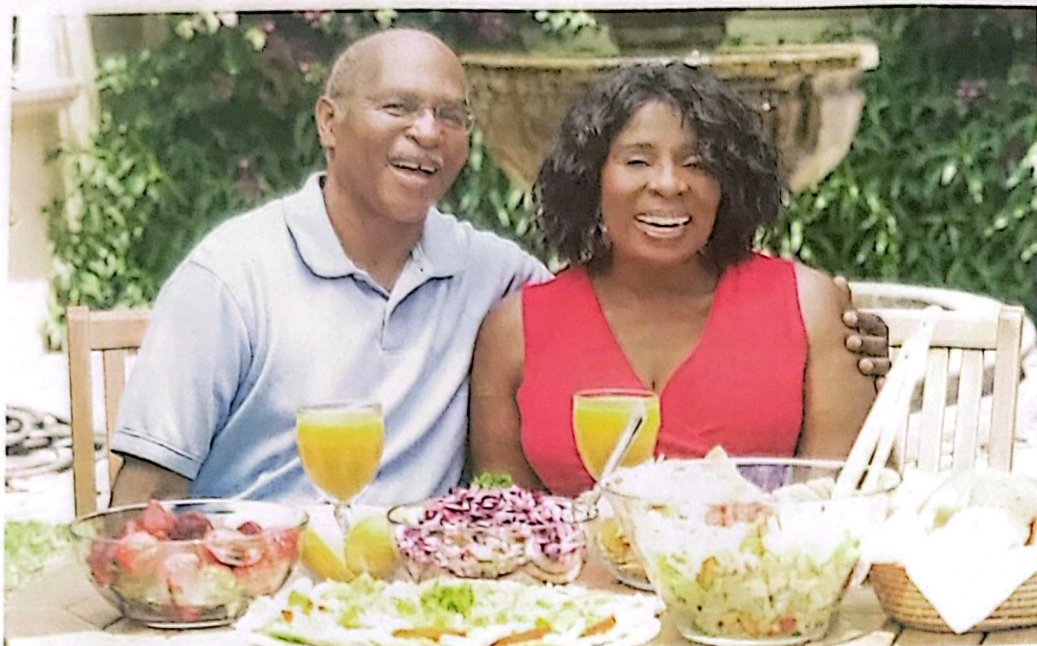


EAT AVOCADO, BROCCOLI, CABBAGE, SPINACH AND LEMONS



Human bodies undergo a lot of chemical processes, some of which are facilitated by an alkaline environment, while the others are facilitated by acidic environments

BY RONALD MUGABE

Is alkaline diet the solution to old age ailments?

WORD OF CAUTION

Jamil Mpiima, a nutritionist at Victoria Hospital, does not have a lot of confidence in the alkaline diet arguments.

"This 'alkaline diet' craze is a fad diet or diet cult that promises weight loss or other health advantages such as longer life without backing by solid science," he says. "There is no scientific evidence that the diet does what it is said to do. Most of such is based on hypothesis."

He advises against an alkaline diet only, saying for healthy eating, a balanced diet is vital.

"Most of these diets are limiting in a way that they cut out carbohydrate foods which usually

foster weight gain. When you eat such foods that are usually mostly composed of vegetables, you cut weight; hence ridding your body of all the ailments that come as a result of being overweight," he further explains.

Mpiima advises that before anyone gets onto an alkaline diet, they first consult a doctor to find out if it is safe for them.

"Some people develop ulcers by doing things like juicing. We are made differently and when it comes to things like diet, it is not a one-size-fits-all situation. A professional's advice is vital before making such decisions," he cautions.

0 is totally acidic, while a pH of 14 is completely alkaline. A pH of 7 is neutral. Those levels vary throughout your body. Both states are important for the body to function well," he says.

People who believe in the

alkaline diet say though acid-producing foods shift our pH balance for only a little while, if you keep shifting your blood PH over and over, you can cause long-lasting acidity.

Alkaline foods include most

fruits and vegetables, soybeans and tofu, some nuts, seeds, and legumes. It is mostly vegetarian. Foods which fall on the acid side include dairy, eggs, meat, most grains, and processed foods such as canned and packaged snacks as well as convenience foods. Most books that tout the alkaline diet say you should not have alcohol or caffeine, either.

WAY FORWARD

Sharon Naluwembe, a nutritionist at Mulago Hospital, says moderation of food quantities is what should be done.

"Unless someone has an issue and an alkaline diet is recommended, but for the rest of the elderly, it is quantities that matter a lot. For example, someone that has ulcers can be advised to eat more alkaline foods since acidic foods are not good for them," she states.

Katanku, however, says he recommends the alkaline diet to his patients.

"I know the components of the alkaline diet are good for the general health of the body. Vegetables are low in acid, have a lot of fibre and largely possess curative components.

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WHAT YOU CAN EAT

1. ALKALINE FOODS

Denis Katanku, a dietician at the Uganda Heart Institute, cautions that though no scientific evidence has been presented to support the alkaline diet, the nutritional benefits of the foods that comprise this diet must not be ignored.

"Foods such as avocado, broccoli, cabbage, spinach and lemons are well known for their health boosting abilities. Referring to one eating them as an 'alkaline diet' can be misleading, but the truth is they are very vital foods for a good health," he says. "People should be cautious about carbonated beverages which are very rich in phosphorus because the mineral causes heavy loss of calcium when taken in large quantities," he says.

2. REFINED FOODS

Refined foods such as white bread, cakes and puff pastry cause acidity in the body, hence forcing calcium out of the bones. Old age is not a smooth ride without one's bones in shape, he said.

3. BALANCED FOODS

Dr James Kafeero, an oncologist at the Uganda Cancer Institute, emphasises a balanced diet too, explaining that because different body parts have different pH, one needs to eat a bit of everything whether alkaline or acid to remain healthy.

"As health workers, we promote a balanced diet. Human bodies undergo a lot of chemical processes some of which are facilitated by an alkaline environment, while others are facilitated by acidic environments. For example, the stomach needs to be acidic to help break down the food we eat," he explains.

Kafeero, however, says acid or alkaline becomes important at the different stages of human development.

"When a child is growing up, they will need more of the acid promoting foods such as proteins and fats to develop their bodies. But when a person approaches old age; with their body organs such as the kidneys and liver lose effective performance in extracting toxins and need more of alkaline promoting foods to reduce pressure on these organs. The antioxidants available in the alkaline foods help them to work less; thereby enabling them to stay healthy longer," he says.

Alkaline foods are good for heart health in old age because they help lower blood pressure and cholesterol, which are big risk factors for heart disease. They lower weight which is also important in preventing and treating diabetes and osteoarthritis. Their chemotherapy drugs are more effective or less toxic and can help prevent cancer.

The more vegetables one eats, the better their health. Taking them raw is even a lot more beneficial as one can gain all the nutritional components, but it is pertinent to note that lemon or vinegar should be added to kill any germs that might be present," he advises.

He explains that sugar and fat are largely responsible for obesity. Therefore, vegetables; which have low fat and no sugar are ideal in aiding an obese person to lose weight.

"For example, when you look at the cause of Type-2 diabetes, it is majorly due to being overweight. Eating more alkaline foods (very low on fat) therefore will help cut weight and reduce the diabetes significantly," he elaborates.