

The Relevance of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to Human Health

Akpan AU*

Department of Agronomy, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria

***Corresponding author:** Akpan AU, Department of Agronomy, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria, Tel: +234-8024485127; Email: annahudo@yahoo.com

Editorial

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Food according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary [1], is defined as "Things that People or animals eat". This depicts that the proper physiological functioning of the human, animal and even plant is determined by the quality of substances taken in. Equally, the time (age) at which these substances are taken, determines their potency in the body of any organism. Perhaps, this is why a reduction in the intakes of some food substances that are sugar-laden, refined flour products, as well as animal products like meats and eggs are unrecommended for people in the age bracket of 40 years and above, because excessive consumption of these products will be poisonous to the body. The human system in particular, finds it difficult to synthesize these products as individual advances in age. It is however worrisome also that today, younger people are becoming hypertensive, diabetic and cancer-prone, due to early exposure to unwholesomely produced food substances.

Vegetables, applies to those plants or plant parts that are usually eaten fresh or cooked with the main course of a meal or used for dessert and salad [2]. They are herbs and shrubs that are cultivated for their fresh or green organs, which are always eaten fresh or boiled.

Fruits are ripened ovaries of plants including the seed within [3]. They are products of growth from an angiosperm, or flowering plant. Fruits are the fleshy growth that arises from the ovary of a flower. The ovary which is often eaten fresh is the part that actually grows to cover the seeds. The ovary therefore provides

protection for the seeds throughout the duration of growth. Furthermore, vegetable according to Nangia [3] are classified by their edible part into (i) root (carrots and Potatoes); (ii) Stem (asparagus and bamboo shoots); (iii) leaf (fluted pumpkin, cabbage, water leaf, lettuce, spinach); (iv) Fruits (okra, tomatoes and cucumbers, pepper and garden egg).

Fruits, which are usually of high moisture contents, are usually low in calories, but are excellent sources of dietary fibre and essential vitamins. Due to the presence of cellulose, pectin, and other organic acids, fruit can act equally as natural laxatives thereby making them valuable part of our diets. Vegetables also are excellent sources of minerals, vitamins, as well as good sources of dietary fibre.

Mango is the dominant tropical fruit variety produced Worldwide, followed by pineapples, papaya and avocado. These major tropical fruits account for about 80% of the global tropical fresh fruits production. Expectedly, global tropical fresh fruits production will increase over decades, while developing countries will continue to account for largest percentage of total global fresh fruits production.

The consumption of both fruits and vegetables has increased significantly in recent times, as people have become more conscious of their health. Recent findings have shown that most eateries that were patronized for junk foods have closed down due to low or non-

patronage. This is not unconnected with the medical findings and sensitization that the causes of most endemic human ailments are what we consume, particularly the junk foods. Junk foods medical researchers have shown are not recommended for people within the age bracket of 40 and above, because they are not easily digestible.

During the ancient era, people embraced vegetable and fruit-based diets. These people were healthier, stronger and lived longer. Few years ago, a paradigm shift from vegetable and fruit to junk foods started holding sway. This shift from vegetable and fruits diets to junks is undoubtedly the reason for the current wave of avoidable human health challenges like cancers, piles, diabetes, paralysis, high blood pressure, cardiac problems, stroke and others. Nature has endowed on vegetables and fruits substances that could be used to cure or prevent almost all human health challenges.

We should remain eternally grateful to medical sciences, for blazing the trail on sensitizing the populace on the need to embrace vegetable and fruits based diets. In fact, the prevailing slogans has been "Let your food be your medicine and your medicine your food. This has clearly highlighted the need for all human to be careful of what they eat as food.

Another issue of urgent importance is the manner that parents are exposing their children to sugar-laden substances and refined flour products in the name snacks particularly during school hours. The present spread of avoidable human ailments worldwide, should be a warning signal to parents, who are exposing their children to unwholesomely produced substances. The protection of the health of the younger generation means that parents must equally exposed the children to fresh vegetables and fruits consumption.

Credence must be given to the World Health Organization (WHO) for earmarking every October 6th, as World Food Day. This day is meant to reiterate the relevance of not only food to human health, but also the need for people to be cautions of what they consume. This day, should also be a day of sober reflection especially on the proliferation of avoidable human health challenges, and the number of deaths therein.

Conclusion/Summary

As we celebrate the World Food Day on October 6th, let all of us think about the global health challenges that have befallen us, due to largely the consumption of bad products. The solutions to these health maladies must also be pondered upon as we celebrate the World Food Day. To my mind, the solution is for us all to embrace fresh fruits and vegetables consumption.

In view of the multiple functions of fruits and vegetables to human health, there is obviously no doubt, that the adoption of this advocacy will bring a major turning-point in our quest for the solutions to the prevailing avoidable health challenges. Also, if the future health of our present younger generation must be protected, the younger people must be exposed early enough to fruits and vegetable diets. Vegetable and fruit grower should be moderate on the quantity of chemical fertilizers applied. Excessive chemical fertilizers will engender higher residual effects on both the soil and crops, thereby making the crops poisonous for human consumption.

Indeed, let our food be our medicine and our medicine our food. Let food moderation also be our watch word. Happy World Food Day to the entire humanity.

Acknowledgement

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