

Every ethnic group in the world has its own type of diet particular to their environment and living habits. Surveys have shown that certain diseases, and ailments are common to those particular diets and when a person undergoes a dramatic change in dietary habits it can reflect in the overall health of the person. I want to talk about the diet of Bilalians (Black Americans) and how the foods we eat affect our health.

One of the biggest causes of sickness and disease among Bilalians has to do with bad eating habits. Down through the years Bilalians have held onto traditional types of foods which health experts are now saying could contribute to high blood pressure and heart disease.

Poor folks have always had to "make do" with whatever cheap foods they could afford to buy. This usually means tough cuts of meat, fatty animals scraps, and staples such as beans and rice.

Poor folks striving to feed their children are concerned with "getting filled up." They don't realize that being full is not the same as being "well fed"!

In preparing this type of food, most cooks choose to fry the meat, so from the first step, more grease is added to the food. Then a gravy is made using leftover fat from the meat, so all of the grease used to prepare the meal is consumed in another form.

Almost without exception, salt is used to season the food and medical doctors now admit that too much salt is one of the major hazards of the typical American diet. Add some bread, butter and something to drink and there you have it—a hot, filling, homecooked meal but one that provides little nutritional value.

Many Bilalians feel this is the best they can afford to buy, but this is not true. You can spend even less and get a more nutritional meal. (I'll talk more about how you can do this in my upcoming columns.)

Then there's another group of Bilalians who can afford to spend more money on food, but they basically prepare their meals in the same manner as the poorer groups.

We all know that "soul food" has been a tradition among Bilalians just as the Italians love pasta and New Englanders have their clam chowder. It's a part of our upbringing and something we're able to call our own.

It just so happens though that what we think of as "soul food" is causing many of the ills that cause Bilalian people to suffer with poor health, and die young. This kind of eating causes obesity and high blood pressure. These two conditions alone can cause numerous other unhealthy conditions in the body. Over-consumption of greasy, salty foods causes you to become constipated because your body begins to dehydrate. The body fluids are used up trying to break down indigestible meats and fats. The natural enzymes within the digestive system are not able to deal with the kinds of foods we eat.

This is why so many people suffer from indigestion. They go out and spend millions of dollars buying drugs that make them feel better not realizing that a handful of anticid

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tablets cannot correct the damage done by eating an unhealthy meal.

It may temporarily relieve the distressing feeling of a knotted stomach or "gas pains," but all that these over-the-counter drugs really do is produce a numbing effect.

The reason you feel sick is because pain is a normal reaction that follows an abnormal condition! If you put something into your body that cannot be broken down and assimilated, your insides tell you that something is wrong by causing discomfort.

Instead of looking for a remedy at the drug store, one would be better off changing his eating habits. This would relieve the problems per-

manently!

Many medical doctors are aware that the eating habits of Americans have a great deal to do with how we feel. But these same doctors are often hesitant to stress a change in diet because many of them share the same unhealthy eating habits.

Imagine walking into a doctor's office and looking for something to get rid of an upset stomach. If the doctor said "give up your pork chops, fatback and fried chicken," that person would probably walk out of the office convinced that the doctor was a quack!

So to stay in business the doctors don't try to educate, they just give their patients what they want—a



prescription for some kind of drug to ease the pain.

Bilalians must realize that soul food is not the most nutritious food. I don't expect you to give it up altogether just because I am telling you this, but if you would just become more aware of the dangers involved maybe you will consider cutting back.

I challenge you to try this experiment and see for yourself. Even if you cut your consumption of these kinds of foods in half you will notice a change in the way you look and feel. Your body will not be sluggish, and you will have more mental and spiritual energy.

—May peace be with you.

You and Your Health

By Dr. Mikal Ramadan

QUESTION: For several years now, I have noticed that several of my friends and acquaintances at work have for one reason or another had hysterectomies. Is this unusual or has this surgery to remove the womb become more popular?

ANSWER: I am afraid that in recent years that hysterectomies (surgical removal of the uterus or womb) has in fact been increasing in popularity among some gynecologists. The most recent figures I've seen places the number at around 800,000 hysterectomies annually, making this type of surgery second in frequency only to tonsillectomies (removal of the tonsils). Only about 20 per cent are performed for other reasons. The most frequent indication is multiple or excessively large fibroids of the uterus. Hysterectomies are also performed for prolonged or irregular bleeding or discharge, "excessive" bleeding, polyps, or sterilization. A great deal depends upon the persuasion of the gynecologist who recommends this procedure and how questioning or compliant the patient is. Recent reports have shown this procedure is frequently abused: that is, performed when some other procedure would have been preferable. I was very happy to hear of the recent move by some insurance companies to decline payment for hysterectomies as a

sterilization procedure. I would strongly recommend for any woman to whom hysterectomy has been suggested to get a second or even a third medical opinion. Studies have shown wide differences of opinions between several doctors evaluating the same patient for this operation.

QUESTION: My 73-year-old grandfather suffered a stroke three months ago and is bedridden, and I am taking care of him. I've been warned about his developing bed sores, but I am not exactly sure of what to look for in the early stages. Would you describe them?

ANSWER: The first sign of a bed sore developing is redness and shininess of the skin in a pressure area such as an elbow, the buttocks, or the heels. This area begins to lose sensitivity and a painless breaking down of the skin's surface occurs. This is followed by a sloughing away of skin and underlying tissue to form an ulcer pit. Frequently these bedsores or decubitus ulcers become infected which makes them very difficult to cure. Fortunately they can always be prevented by alertness on your part.

QUESTION: Our neighbor's 8-year-old son has developed the strangest grimacing on the right side of his face. He seems to do it involuntarily but I've noticed that it seems to increase when he gets upset. Their family doctor called it a tic but didn't



give any medicine for it. It just seems like something more should be done about it to me.

ANSWER: I don't think so. It is not unusual for such tics or "habit spasms" to develop in children between the ages of 5 and 12. They are often localized in a single area or with a certain group of muscles. It is thought they may occur beyond the conscious awareness or control of the individual. Tics are seldom related to any underlying nervous system disorders and they generally pass away as the child grows older. But I notice that you mentioned this child's tic increases when he gets upset. This may indicate some psychological roots in this case.