

## MALNUTRITION: THE OTHER PLAGUE

Many people associate malnutrition with stick-limbed adults and babies with bulbous bellies and staring eyes. But malnutrition results as much from overeating – especially of the wrong foods – as from poverty and famine. The “mal” in “malnutrition” means “bad”, and bad nutrition is common among rich and poor alike. The poor favour greasy take-aways, crisps, freezits and other junk foods over cheap, wholesome food they can grow at home. The obese Western teenager scoffing his double beefburger and chips with a can of cooldrink may suffer from just as many life-threatening conditions as his impoverished counterpart in Africa, and his life expectancy may be just as short. AIDS has dominated media reporting on health for two decades, but the syndrome is only one pattern in a multitude of diseases and conditions that plague us. Most of them are related to, if not caused by, lifestyle and diet.

In my workshops on survival skills I use the equation, Western lifestyle + Western diet = Western diseases. This usually raises a nervous laugh of disbelief from the participants until I ask them, “Did your great-granny suffer from heart disease, high blood pressure or obesity?” The answer is almost always “no”, and the question is: what’s the difference?

**One fist of iron, the other of steel. If the left one don't get you, the right one will.** - From the song, *Sixteen Tons*.

It is well known that malnutrition invites disease and that disease leads to malnutrition. Proper nutrition makes the immune system function efficiently. The breakdown in immunity associated with malnutrition is sometimes called “nutritional acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome” (NAIDS) and is thought to be a leading factor in making it easier for people to become infected and fall sick.

In the Thirties, Weston Price, a dentist, travelled around the world to observe the impact of refined carbohydrates on traditional societies. The results of his study were published in a book called *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*, now regarded as a classic on the subject.



As a dentist, Price took special note of the people’s teeth, one of the most obvious signs of physical degeneration. He also noted the alteration in facial

structure. This was quite clear when he photographed a family with many children. The first child was usually well formed with strong bones and regular features. Each successive child tended to show more degeneration of bones and teeth. This was probably due to the increasing shortages of calcium in the mother caused by her excessive intake of refined carbohydrates and sugar.

The same degeneration can be noted in our society. The photos that Price took are shocking. They are a powerful tool in alerting people to the dangers of consuming too much sugar and too many refined carbohydrates. He found that an increase in the incidence of TB followed the introduction of refined carbohydrates into the diet of Africans.

Closer to home, the late University of Zimbabwe professor, Michael Gelfand, observed that before Africans began to adopt a Western diet, few of them suffered strokes (embolism or thrombosis), which happen when a blood vessel bursts in the brain, often leaving the victim paralysed. Such a condition was rare among the African population of Zimbabwe. Kushi, the foremost writer on macrobiotics, found that ulcers and diabetes were uncommon among Africans who kept to a traditional diet.

These diseases are common today in Zimbabwe, along with tuberculosis (TB), high blood pressure, cancer and tooth decay. Killing quietly, they receive none of the attention that AIDS does, but they are just as lethal and widespread. What makes the problem worse is that they are around in full force at the same time as HIV/AIDS. The hallmark of HIV infection is a weakened resistance to "opportunistic" infections. The important changes which the virus brings about in a person's immune system look just like the disorders seen in the advanced stages of malnutrition. Sometimes the lines are blurred; diagnosis becomes difficult. High blood pressure affects people who have symptoms of AIDS the same as it does those who don't. Likewise, people assume that anyone who has TB has AIDS, but Price demonstrated that TB may also follow a poor diet.

Western diseases and conditions have a proven link with diet, so it follows that an improvement in the diet will improve the health. Shortages of zinc, vitamin A, C and niacin in the body are important pointers to how HIV-related diseases are likely to progress. Studies have shown that mineral and vitamin supplements given to people with HIV slow down the progress of the virus.

When heart disease was linked with excessive consumption of saturated fats, millions of Americans began to eat less red meat which led to fewer heart problems. Individuals who have adopted a way of living and eating like the one we recommend in this book have all seen their health improve.

### **Every dark cloud has a silver lining**

I call HIV "the Great Revealer". While almost everything published about HIV is negative and shocking, I believe that the world may greatly benefit from its impact. Many wives and mothers have told me that "AIDS is the best thing that ever happened to my marriage". This is because for the first time in their relationship, husbands were coming home early and sober, and the couples had time to talk to each other.

Laws and practices which are prevalent today were once considered taboo or unspeakable and not examined thoughtfully. They include domestic violence, marital rape, incest, child abuse and homosexuality. The inequality in power and status between men and women was never acknowledged. Today it is recognised as a major factor driving the spread of the pandemic.

The way in which malnutrition speeds up the progression of HIV to AIDS is widely known, but people with the condition do not always feel motivated to change their lifestyle and diet. We all know the compulsive smoker who repeatedly says, "I really must give up. I will do it next week!" until the day he or she gets emphysema or cancer of the lungs.

Niro Asistent, a healer based in New York, is one of the few people said to have conquered AIDS without drugs. In her book, *Why I Survive AIDS*, she writes: "AIDS has created a healing momentum on our planet. It is forcing us to question our values, our morals and our identities. It is forcing us to re-evaluate the entire foundation of life as we know it. It is challenging us to treat our fellow human beings with compassion and understanding. This is the message of AIDS."

We hope this book will provide a light at the end of the tunnel, giving hope to the hopeless and providing practical and sensible advice based on the traditional diet to counteract some of today's most pressing health problems.

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## GLOSSARY

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**AIDS:** acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome - a "syndrome" or pattern made up of various unusual and serious infections which are normally controlled by a healthy immune system

**antibiotics:** medicines which destroy or slow down the growth of the bacteria that make us sick

**anti-oxidants:** agents in food, usually vitamins, which are needed to keep the immune system strong (see free radicals below)

**anti-retrovirals (ARVs):** drugs which reduce the levels of the HIV virus in the bloodstream

**"bad" fats:** also called "saturated" fats, which are hard for the body to absorb and process and put special strain on the liver

**beta carotene:** the orange, yellow or red pigment of fruits and vegetables, notably carrots, which is converted to Vitamin A in the liver

**blood sugar:** the glucose in the blood which the body uses for energy. Unrefined complex carbohydrates are the best source of blood sugar

**CD-4 cells:** also called T-helper cells, are like officers in your army of defence which protects you against infection and disease

**chigayo:** grinding mill

**chimera:** malt

**dahl:** a sauce made from lentils, a favourite throughout India

**derere:** okra, hibiscus

**dolomite:** a white mineral containing calcium and magnesium

**dovi:** peanut butter

**echinacea:** a herb especially useful for respiratory and skin ailments

**enteric coated:** refers to tablets or capsules coated with a substance to promote ease and comfort of digestion

**flora:** harmless micro-organisms occurring naturally in the intestines and vagina

**folic acid:** a B vitamin which occurs mainly in leafy green vegetables and is used to treat anaemia

**forumla milk:** a commercial substitute for mother's milk usually sold as a fortified powder

**free radicals:** unstable atoms which can bind up the anti-oxidant vitamins needed to keep the immune system strong

**gundamiti:** a herbal treatment to boost immunity, available in Zimbabwe

**"good" fats:** also called "polyunsaturated" fats, which contain essential fatty acids; they occur naturally in beans, seeds and nuts, and in avocados and oily fish



***guru nematumbu:*** stomach lining and intestines, a traditional delicacy in Zimbabwe and similar to tripe and onions

***gut:*** intestine at the lower part of the alimentary canal

***HIV:*** human immuno-deficiency virus, a tiny germ that can cause your immune system to lose its ability to defend your body

***hummus:*** a creamy dip made from pureed chickpeas

***i.u.'s:*** international units, used to express values of certain vitamins

***ishwa:*** edible flying ants

***kabuli:*** an Afghan rice dish with carrots, raisins and almonds

***kapenta:*** tiny fish, like sardines

***kusika:*** whisk

***lacto:*** the local name for the sour milk sold in supermarkets

***lacto-bacillus:*** a bacterium that turns milk into yoghurt

***leavened:*** refers to bread that is risen by the action of yeast or soda

***lysine:*** an essential amino-acid that occurs in proteins

***macrobiotics:*** a dietary regime originating in Japan and emphasising the traditional ways of eating

***madora:*** edible mopani worms, caterpillars

***madumbe:*** taro, a starchy edible tuber

***mahewu:*** a traditional fortifying drink fermented from the meal of grains such as maize, millet and sorghum

***mapfunde:*** sorghum

***maputi:*** popcorn; popped maize

***marula:*** a wild fruit

***matoke:*** plantain or type of green banana used widely in African cooking

***mazhanzhe:*** also called mahobohobo, a wild fruit

***mazondo:*** pig's trotters

***mbanje:*** hemp or cannabis

***mbodza:*** improperly cooked sadza that is indigestible

***mealies:*** ears of maize; maize kernels, corn on the cob

***mhunga:*** bullrush millet

***Moducare, boxwood extract and SPV 30:*** herbal treatments to boost immunity

***mowa:*** amaranth leaves

***mubora:*** boiled pumpkin leaves, a traditional delicacy

***mufushwa:*** dried vegetables

***muriwo:*** vegetable relish

**mutakura:** maize kernels boiled with certain beans or ground nuts

**nyama:** meat

**nyemba:** cow peas

**nyimo:** ground peas

**nzungu:** ground nuts

**okara:** ground soya bean mash left over after the milk has been extracted

**“opportunistic” infections:** those caused by germs which are harmless to healthy people, but which afflict a person whose immune system has been weakened by disease or drug treatment

**quinoa:** a small, light-brown grain-like fruit originally grown in the Andes mountains in South America.

**risi-bisi:** a Vietnamese rice dish with peas, lemon and oil

**sadza:** stiff porridge made from the meal of the traditional grains or maize

**tahini:** butter made from ground sesame seeds

**T-helper cells:** see CD-4 cells

**thrush (candida albicans):** a fungal, or yeast, infection of the mouth and vagina

**tofu:** soya bean curd

**tortilla:** a Mexican flat bread made from maize or wheat flour

**trichinosis:** a disease marked by nausea, fever and diarrhoea and caused by eating infected pork that hasn't been thoroughly cooked

**trypsin inhibitor:** a substance that inhibits the digestion of protein

**tsunga:** mustard rape

**wok:** a metal pan with a curved base used by the Chinese for deep-frying, stir-frying, steaming and sauteeing

**zviyo:** finger millet

## APPENDIX

We have attempted to write this book in a language that is accessible and understandable for readers from all walks of life and at any level of literacy. We have used words and ideas that can be easily and accurately translated into the vernacular. We have tried to keep the message straightforward and simple.

This book is for the layman reader. It is meant for all people who have health problems and need to know what to do. We hope it will also be read and enjoyed by health professionals, caregivers, counsellors and teachers.

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