
Editorial

Science and Commonsense in Healthy Living

The UNESCO initiated World Science Day for the current year focuses attention on the theme ‘Science and Healthy Living’. The Science Magazine, Vidurava, has lined up six articles written by knowledgeable persons that deal with various scientific aspects of healthy living.

In dealing with this subject, it may also be relevant to explore the global scene in respect of the hotly debated issue of healthy living in the wake of the rapidly changing lifestyles. It is no secret that the greatest concern today is the highly unsatisfactory condition referred to as obesity resulting from excessive consumption of processed foods, which is one of the most significant contributory factors for what are widely recognized as non-communicable diseases. It has been claimed that in the US alone, one-third of the adults and over 12.5 million children and teens are obese, and in the last 30 years obesity in children and teens had tripled.

Lisa Sasson, a New York University Professor of Nutrition claims that there is a psychology component in eating, especially when one is conscious of weight loss, though sticking to the correct “Portion Size (of food) is half the battle”. It has been found that the so-called portion size in American restaurants had doubled or tripled in the last 20 years, and it is changing the concept of a normal meal. The situation in Sri Lankan restaurants cannot be any different. In fact in a recent review article published in a Sri Lankan newspaper (Daily Mirror of 16th October, 2016), Dr. Navoda Atapattu and Dr. Prasad Katulanda, two recognized endocrinologists, state that people very confidently claim that they consume regularly kurakkan roti, rathu bath (red rice), mung, kola

kenda and plenty of fruits, which no doubt are wholesome and nutritious. But the reality is that the portion size is huge, and what is also ignored is that kola kenda is laced often with thick coconut milk, which has its own fatty content. Dr. Katulanda also makes the point that some people after consuming a large glass of kola kenda indulges in another meal, making it a double breakfast, while Dr. Atapattu explains that the response in such instances should be a “portion exchange”. As an example of what is meant by portion exchange is that if one intends to have a large banana as a desert, then the main meal must comprise only of half a cup of rice instead of a full cup of rice.

In a study of 173 obese women of 25-30 years of age, researchers had found that swapping out sweetened beverages with plain water was linked to weight loss independent of diet and exercises. It is in fact said that one can of soda water (in the US) contains 10 teaspoons of sugar, and in the US people are said to drink around 500 cans of soda every year, equivalent to 52 pounds (approx. 23.5 kg) of sugar.

Dr. Navoda Atapattu insists that it is commonsense that “greens, greens and more greens” should be the answer for healthy living, while Dr. Katulanda underscores the ‘non-value of sugar, which he stresses has only ‘empty calories’ with no nutrition, no protein, no fibre, no minerals and no vitamins.

Thus we see that apart from the great contributions made by science and technology, especially in evolving some of the most innovative and sophisticated techniques to help us enjoy a healthy life, commonsense should also prevail all the time to support the developments resulting from science.

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