

**A second on the lips, a lifetime on the hips!**



This piece is about healthy eating. The best of us would leave our good senses behind and 'pig' out during celebrations and then suffer through the next couple of weeks trying to lose all that weight. Ever heard of 'a second on the lips, a lifetime on the hips?' Well, that certainly describes this.

There are all sorts of diets and eating regimens available, most of which impose the most amazing restrictions to our diets. But, these more often than not result in yo-yo dieting...I'm on today and off tomorrow. I am skewed towards a more realistic, conscious lifestyle modification that stands the test of time, involves things that are inculcated into everyday life decisions of what to eat, that is more sustainable. What does this involve? Here goes:

Eat more fruits and vegetables. Eating them in as close to their natural state as possible is, of course more beneficial. We fall into their temptation of wanting to do the right thing but doing it on our terms; this would involve

dousing these vegetables in oil and frying them. These vegetables are rich in Vitamin C which is water soluble and so unnecessary cooking strips them of this nutrient. If we've got to cook them at all, add them at the final stage of cooking and cook for the barest minimum time: a minute or two. Some of the veggies are of course delicious eaten raw: carrots, lettuce, cabbage etc. These can be used in a salad with a dressing of balsamic vinegar or olive oil as opposed to all the fatty salad dressings out there. The leaf of the garden egg, called akwukwo anara in Ibo and efo gbagba (I hope I got that right?!) in Yoruba is also delicious when eaten raw as a major part of the meal.

Talking about fruits and vegetables leads me to the question, 'how much of these can we realistically have in each meal?' Well, the answer is probably not what you'd love to hear but happens to be true. For a standard dinner plate, half of it should be filled with fruits/vegetables, a quarter devoted to carbohydrates (carbs) and a quarter devoted to the protein component. The rule of thumb for the carbs is that it should not be more than the quantity in the cupped palm of one hand! I hear your groans 😊. For the petite people like me (this is more politically correct than saying, 'short' or one of the funniest ones I've heard, 'vertically challenged!'), this is a BIG problem! Close your eyes and visualise the tiny portions that can be accommodated in those tiny palms...sigh!

It is tough going initially until your tummy adjusts to this portion...which is in little or no time. For the carbs, it would be great to focus on the complex carbs: brown (or ofada) rice etc. This all boils down to portion control.

We talk about healthy oils: Olive oils, canola oils etc. But really, even these contain pure fat with about 120 calories in each tablespoonful of olive oil, be it light or extra light. To put this in context, consider how much time it takes to burn off 100 calories at the gym and the relative ease with which a tablespoon of oil goes onto our food. In the Johnny Walker chapter, we talk about walking 10,000 steps per day. If you do those 10,000 steps in a day, you burn between 300 to 400 calories per day and less if you walk mainly flat surfaces! And yet, with one spoon of oil, more than a quarter of all that 'amazing hard work' has gone down the drain! SO remember your screams of 'oh no! 10,000!' and compare that with the calories burnt and then how much you gained by just adding a drop more oil. If this doesn't convince you to go easy on the oils, I don't know what else will! If you come from the Yoruba tribe (please be sure not to tell them I said this :)), then traditionally, cooking involves ladles and ladles of oils like palm oil (which has a high content of saturated fats associated with high cholesterol levels). I remember the first time I was exposed to stew from the Yoruba race, it had so much oil that I couldn't see the tomatoes! Being a 'kobo kobo' girl who was born into a race where we live a diet of vegetables (in as raw a state as possible) and little oil, that was a culture shock and I never quite got used to it (Please don't let my in-laws know that all that time I pretended to love those stews, I was actually just

suffering through them ;)). It was almost as great a culture shock as learning to kneel down to greet. I developed waist pain the first time we travelled to the village what with all that kneeling which my 'okoro 'knees were not used to :) Again I digress!

The point is: Use very little oil to cook...you really don't need more than a spoon or two depending on what you're cooking. I hear you groaning and wondering how this will taste? But hey, here's another project: re-training your taste buds. Let them get used to less oil and less salt.

Talking about salt, are you one of those who routinely use the salt shaker in their food even before they taste it? Well that is a habit that's got to be tossed. Salt has been implicated (in different studies at different times) in hypertension. The rule of thumb is, 'if you can taste it, it's probably too much!'

Does this whole discourse mean to send you to that existence that is focused on just being alive and not enjoying life? As a couple of my friends would tell me, 'na something go kill person'. So live in the moment, enjoy it and go out with a bang! Well, that's certainly an option but consider this: I hear you thinking (don't ask me how I hear people think. I've got psychic powers like that!) the food that I get to eat using these suggestions are definitely going to be bland! Nope. They don't have to be. Use spices to add that extra special zing to your food. Thyme, curry, garlic are some good examples of somebody/heart healthy spices to use in food and give it a little something extra.

Remember not to skip meals because when you do, you compensate for this later and binge. So for breakfast eat like a king (buttressing the importance of breakfast), for lunch, eat like a prince and for dinner, eat like a pauper!

Breakfast could be a nourishing bowl of oatmeal. For those of you who hate it, like my children, some cinnamon (which has amazing health benefits including lowering cholesterol) makes it tastier. Lunch could be wheat meal with vegetable soup and fish; Dinner could be something light like moi-moi.

Remember to keep with the cooking instructions and portions...a handful. An acceptable way of circumventing this or increasing the portion available is to grow taller and of course increase hand span. He he he! Let's see you try :D  
Here's to a healthier you!