

No Peas and Rice in 2005

By Barrington H. Brennen, January 4, 2005

Bahamians love peas and rice. I do too, at least when it's cooked wholesomely. We love it so much that we eat it every day of the year, sometimes two and three times a day. Even on holidays and other festive occasions, many Bahamians feel that if there is one dish that must be included in the meal, it is peas and rice. But that's not all. Peas and rice has a few companions: potato salad, macaroni and cheese, and cole slaw. This dietary quartet joins forces every day in Bahamian kitchens with cooks and chefs, moms and dads, who work together to satisfy large appetites. Is it really a healthy diet?

DEADLY COMBINATION

Peas and Rice. It is my opinion that having this kind of meal every day of your life is boring and unhealthy, especially when it is prepared with little or no variety. Peas and rice can be a wholesome meal. However, the traditional method of preparing peas and rice may prove to be more of a nuclear bomb than a nutrition energy source. When a lot of fat (often lard), pork, or crab is added to peas and rice, it turns this potentially wholesome meal into a hard-to-digest substance that clogs the plumbing systems of the human body. Loaded with a dangerously high level of cholesterol and salt, Bahamians open their mouths every day to a meal designed to put them prematurely in the grave. Thousands of Bahamian hearts, veins, arteries, kidney, livers, and stomachs are screaming for help to escape the daily onslaught of these enemies of the human body. Ignoring the pains and aches, and being tantalized by the spices and seasonings, many unashamedly keep on stuffing themselves and clogging their system. Not even the traditional yucky castor oil, Mama's powerful annual purging medicine and nature's liquid plumber, can unclog the drains.

We mistakenly think of society's destructive forces only in terms of guns, illegal drugs, premarital sex, teenage pregnancies, sexually-transmitted infections, intimate partner abuse, incest, murder, rape, robbery, etc. But we are oblivious to the fact that one of the greatest destroyers of the Bahamian society is being cooked-up every day in our own kitchens. Our diet is clogging our minds, preventing us from thinking clearly, responsibly and lovingly. It is making us nervous, edgy, stressed, angry, and irrational.

Macaroni and Cheese. Joining peas and rice on the path to destroying the Bahamian society is macaroni and cheese. This is a really tasty but unhealthy meal, at least when cooked the traditional way. Many Bahamians feel that they cannot have tasty macaroni and cheese without whole milk, cheddar cheese, whole eggs and butter. This extremely high cholesterol combination is dangerous and joins the fat-laden peas and rise in keeping its victims marching to the doctor for complaints of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart problems, etc.

Potato Salad and Cole Slaw. Completing this deadly dietary quartet is potato salad and cole slaw. Once again, these can be healthy dishes, but their potentially nutrition elements are destroyed with high cholesterol mayonnaise, whole eggs, and condiments. A daily diet of traditional peas and rice, macaroni and cheese, potato salad and cole slaw, is as bad as putting sand in your car's gasoline tank or not changing the car oil and filter for years. Compounding this great health risk that this dietary quartet brings is the serious lack of roughage --fresh fruits or vegetables. This makes it even more difficult for the greasy foods and high sugars to be scrubbed away from walls of our digestive systems.

EATING TOO MUCH

We eat too much. Not only do many Bahamians choose to eat a diet loaded with grease and

cholesterol, they indulge in too much of it. It seems as if it is an honor or respect to create mountains of food on one's plate when being served. It is certainly an embarrassing and gluttonous habit that must be broken. Many years ago, one of the world's most respected non-academic nutritionists, Ellen White, stated in the book "Mind, Character, and Personality" these words:

"Overeating befores the brain. The most precious words may be heard and not appreciated, because the mind is confused by an improper diet. . . . The health of the mind is to a large degree dependent upon the health of the body, and the health of the body is dependent upon the way in which the living machinery is treated. Eat only that food which will keep your stomach in the most healthy condition."

White expands these thoughts as she talks about the use of tobacco. She says:

"Tobacco, in whatever form it is used, tells upon the constitution. It is a slow poison. It affects the brain and benumbs the sensibilities so that the mind cannot clearly discern spiritual things, especially those truths which would have a tendency to correct this filthy indulgence."

There is a myriad of studies supporting these teachings. Recent studies have shown that high intake of saturated fat, cholesterol, and the use of tobacco and alcohol, clog the arteries and are associated with higher risk for Alzheimer's disease and damage to the nervous system.

DIET AND CHURCH PROBLEMS

The problems in our society are often very visible in our churches and sometimes originate there. One of the main reasons for this is that too many so-called Christians have poor lifestyles and diets, thus making it impossible for them to become truly spiritual and responsible citizens. Ellen White has something powerful to share on this point in her book "Diets and Foods," page 32:

"The abuses of the stomach by the gratification of appetite, are the fruitful source of most church trials. Those who eat and work intemperately and irrationally, talk and act irrationally. An intemperate man cannot be a patient man. It is not necessary to drink alcoholic liquors in order to be intemperate. The sin of intemperate eating, eating too frequently, too much, and of rich, unwholesome food, destroys the healthy action of the digestive organs, affects the brain, and perverts the judgment, preventing rational, calm, healthy thinking and acting. And this is a fruitful source of church trials. Therefore in order for the people of God to be in an acceptable state with Him, where they can glorify Him in their bodies and spirits which are His, they must with interest and zeal deny the gratification of their appetites, and exercise temperance in all things. Then may they comprehend the truth in its beauty and clearness, and carry it out in their lives, and by a judicious, wise, straightforward course, give the enemies of our faith no occasion to reproach the cause of truth."

TIME TO CHANGE

Dear reader, let 2005 be the year for positive change in your lifestyle. This will help you to become more productive, spiritually responsive, loving and caring. Learn how to cook peas and rice, macaroni and cheese, potato salad and cold slaw in healthy ways. Reduce the fat content, avoid the yolk of the eggs, and eliminate whole milk. Additionally, avoid eating the same foods every day. Have a great variety in your diet and eat an abundance of fruits and vegetables every day. Next week I will present some simple healthy recipes for these dishes.

I believe that more Bahamian families will be healthier and happier when their diets and lifestyles are changed. Many of our family and national problems start right in our cooking pots. Let's start to cook wholesomely. **Barrington Brennen is a Marriage and Family Therapist and a certified psychologist.**

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