

EATING HABITS OF URBAN BANTU, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SCHOOL-GOING CHILD

A. C. F. OUDKERK, *National Nutrition Research Institute, CSIR, Pretoria*

The dietary survey which formed part of the 1963 nutrition status survey done on Bantu school children of 7-15 years consisted of a dietary record for 24 hours and a questionnaire relating to the dietary history of the child and the eating habits of the family.

Interviews were conducted by non-White nurses, trained by a White dietitian, who also controlled their work during the survey.

The information to be discussed was obtained from interviews held with the parents or guardians of 576 Bantu children resident in non-White locations in the Pretoria area, viz. Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Lady Selbourne and Eastwood.

DAILY DIETARY PATTERN OF THE CHILD

The dietary pattern of the urban Bantu shows the same weekly cycle as the Western eating pattern. There is a

definite difference between weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays and the daily intake is also spread over 3 meals, in contrast to the rural Bantu, who have only 2 meals a day, namely one late in the morning and another in the evening.

The typical breakfast of a Bantu school child during the week consists of bread and tea. The bread is usually eaten dry. When money is available (usually at the beginning of the month or during weekends) jam is eaten with the bread. Butter is eaten very seldom. In the case of the few children who had porridge for breakfast, it usually took the form of thin mealie-meal porridge sweetened with sugar. Tea is drunk with sugar and (sweetened) condensed milk. It is sometimes replaced by the so-called 'starch water', a mixture of hot water, condensed milk and sugar.

During the school break, the children eat a 'pickle hamburger' and take a cold drink. When money is short the

cold drink might be foregone, but not the pickle hamburger. A pickle hamburger, which is eaten practically every day by every child, consists of a thick slab of brown bread weighing approximately 150 G and a small amount of mango pickles. The hamburgers cost 2½c each and are sold at cafés or by women sitting outside the school grounds.

Lunch usually consists of a piece of beef and stiff mealie-meal porridge with a meat sauce or a tomato sauce made of tomato and onions. Sometimes it consists only of porridge and this home-made tomato sauce.

For supper there is usually beef, boiled either alone or with potatoes. Stiff mealie-meal porridge again forms the bulk of the meal. With it is taken meat gravy and 'marog' (mixed greens) or cabbage. The evening meal is the one meal partaken of by the whole family.

On Saturdays the children follow very much the same eating pattern as during the week, except that the pickle hamburger is not eaten so regularly and fish and chips are often eaten for lunch.

If breakfast is eaten on Sundays it takes the same form as during the week, but it is very often omitted. Sunday dinner is the big meal of the week, when everything edible in the house is cooked. Such a midday dinner usually consists of beef, potatoes and/or samp, mealie-rice or rice. Three or four vegetables are cooked and a sweet is also served, by far the most popular being jelly and custard. For supper, left-overs from dinner are served, supplemented by stiff mealie-meal porridge.

INTAKE OF DIFFERENT FOODS BY THE FAMILY

The data which will now be dealt with were obtained from the section of the questionnaire relating to the family. It must be stressed that these data apply only to food eaten in the home. Food eaten by the men in the city, whether bought or received from their employers, is not taken into account. The same applies to women employed in domestic service or elsewhere.

Milk

Of the 576 families interviewed, 61% use condensed milk daily, 32% fresh milk, and the rest powdered milk, skimmed milk or sour milk.

Condensed milk is used in tea or, as already explained, drunk as 'starch water'. It is also used as a supplementary food for babies, in which case it is diluted with water, and sugar is sometimes added. In many cases where the baby is not breast fed, it is the only feed given.

The above information might seem to suggest that the milk consumption of these Bantu families is satisfactory, but when the quantity consumed is taken into consideration the picture looks entirely different. In most cases the milk is taken only in tea, and then only once a day. It is very seldom that tea is drunk more often than once a day. The quantity of milk used with tea varies from 6 G to 20 G, the average being approximately 14 G. It must also be borne in mind that milk is one of the first items to be omitted when money becomes scarce.

Meat, Fish and Eggs

Meat, mainly beef, is eaten at least once a day. We found that only 8% of the families investigated did not eat meat every day. Again, it must be stressed that the

portions eaten are small. The quantity consumed varies from 28 G to 60 G of cooked meat per day, and the average portion weighs 30 G.

Liver and kidneys are seldom used. Belly of beef and shank are fairly popular. Mutton is very seldom used, and pork only exceptionally.

Fish is eaten once a week by 31% of the families, while 53% eat it less frequently. Thus only 16% never eat fish. Tinned fish and sardines are very popular, as is also the cooked product obtainable from cafés. The latter, however, usually consists of more batter than fish.

Eggs are a commodity which, according to the results of this survey, are used by very few Bantu families. It is difficult to say whether this is due to tradition or whether the cost of eggs is the cause. We found that only 13% used eggs more often than once a week, while 41% used them less frequently and 46% never. The families which use eggs regularly often keep their own fowls.

Bread

The Bantu are often represented as making a meal of half a loaf of white bread and a bottle of Coca-cola. It was found, however, that at home there is a preference for brown bread, for 82% of families regularly used brown bread and only 16% white bread. Only 3 children used wholewheat bread and 1 rye bread.

Mealie-meal

The majority of families, namely 94%, used mealie-meal every day, served as stiff or thin porridge. A number of families also used stiff or thin sour porridge. Stiff porridge is usually preferred for lunch and supper and thin porridge for breakfast.

An indication was obtained of the quantity of porridge eaten by the children by taking a few random examples. The daily intake varied from 400 G to over 2,000 G with an average of 900 G. There were no age and sex differences in the quantities eaten.

Samp, Mealie-rice and Rice

It was difficult to determine which of these three foods was eaten most frequently, but it would appear that rice is more popular than samp or mealie-rice. One of these three foods is usually eaten on Sundays but very seldom during the week.

Butter, Margarine and other Fats

At the time of this survey only 6% of the families used butter every day and 26% never. The remaining 68% used butter irregularly, usually at the beginning of the month or over weekends. This low consumption should be ascribed to the low income of the Bantu rather than to a lack of knowledge of the product.

Margarine followed practically the same pattern as butter; 4% used it every day, 36% never, and 60% only occasionally.

Cooking oil and other fats are used in the preparation of food. For instance, they are added to vegetable stew and used in the making of the tomato and onion sauce.

Peanuts

This is a very popular food among adults as well as children, and 78% of the families were found to use peanuts at least once a week or more often. They are

ground and served with 'marog' or other vegetables as a sort of stew, or are bought by the children from street vendors or at school.

Peanut butter is not as popular as peanuts, but is sometimes eaten with bread.

Vegetables and Fruit

As already stated, Sunday is the day when the Bantu family partakes freely of vegetables. During the week only a few varieties are regularly prepared. Potatoes are cooked with meat practically every day. Cabbage or 'marog' is served several times a week with the meat and porridge of the evening meal. A tomato and onion sauce is also frequently served with the porridge.

Marog may be bought in the dried form or prepared by the housewife herself. It consists of the leaves of different vegetables, such as beet and pumpkin, and is cooked in milk and water, after which it is dried in the sun. This dried product keeps for a long time. Before it is used again, it is soaked in milk or water and prepared in different ways. It can be boiled as it is, or tomatoes and onions can be added. Another popular way of preparing it is to mix it with ground peanuts.

The use of fruit is determined by what is seasonably available. Apples and oranges are the most popular choice. A number of families have a grapevine or a few peach trees in their backyards. The fruit is eaten freely by the family and the peaches are sometimes canned.

Wild Animals, Fruit and Insects

The urban Bantu no longer make general use of wild fruit, insects and game. In answer to specific questions, a number stated that they do eat these foods but can obtain them only when they go to farms.

Dried mopanie worms are generally available in cafés in non-White residential areas. At the time of the present survey they were being sold at 5c per oz. Only one child among those surveyed had ever eaten them.

Beverages

The majority of urban Bantu are tea drinkers. Families who regularly use coffee are the exception. Tea is taken black or with milk when available. Sugar is always used, and in fairly large quantities.

The families who can afford it use cocoa and other chocolate drinks fairly regularly.

Cold drinks are often bought by the children and men. It is unfortunately not clear from the data whether the women, especially those who stay at home, also take cold drinks regularly.

Food Taboos

Although questions relating to food taboos were not extensive, it would appear from this survey that superstition and tradition no longer play an important role in the eating habits of the urban Bantu. Of the 576 families interviewed, only 22% avoided some food or other because of superstition or tradition. The commonest taboo was against pork and second on the list was a combination of meat and alcoholic drinks.

PRELIMINARY DATA FOR THE INTAKE OF CERTAIN NUTRIENTS

From the preliminary data available for the intake of certain nutrients, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Carbohydrate intake is high. This is easily understandable when the quantity of porridge and bread is taken into account.

Calorie consumption, if judged by the averages for the various age groups, would appear to be adequate. The large quantities of porridge eaten obviously play an important part.

The intake of proteins was very low in certain cases, and in general it would appear that the average intake is rather low in every age group in comparison with the standard recommended allowances. Again it must be stressed that although a large percentage of children do eat meat every day, the portions are very small. The intake of other protein-rich foods is also very low.

The average vitamin-A intakes appear to be adequate in all age groups as judged by the recommended allowances. It is worthy of mention that 'marog' has a high carotene content. It also contains vitamin A, but the actual amount could unfortunately not be determined.

Riboflavin and vitamin-C intakes appear to be low. This is not surprising in view of the low milk consumption and irregular use of vegetables and fruit.

At this stage nothing can be said about thiamine, nicotinic acid, calcium and iron intakes.

CONCLUSION

The dietary pattern discussed is a very monotonous one. One of the most important determining factors is certainly the low income of the Bantu. The fact that their diet includes a greater variety during weekends and towards the end of the month when money is more plentiful is an indication that the foods obtainable in the cities are not unknown or unacceptable to them.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the eating habits here discussed are those of a specific group of families which include school-going children among their numbers. Among childless couples or unattached persons the picture might be completely different.

SUMMARY

During 1963 a nutrition status survey was carried out on 576 Bantu school children of 7-15 years, resident in locations in the Pretoria area. The dietary survey included the recording of 1 day's weighed food intake for each child and the dietary history of both child and family.

The dietary patterns characteristic of weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays were considered separately. No difference was found between the weekday and Saturday patterns, but the Sunday pattern differed from those for the other days.

The foods used by the Bantu households are discussed. It was found that few used fresh milk, preference being given to sweetened condensed milk. Meat is eaten daily, but in very small amounts. Fish is eaten once a week or less, and eggs very seldom. Mealie-meal is used daily by almost every household and brown bread by about 82%. A small percentage use white bread every day, but wholewheat bread was used by only 3 of the families surveyed. Fruit and vegetables are usually eaten on Sundays, 'marog' or wild greens contributing an important share. Butter is used only during weekends or towards the end of the month. The use of tea, coffee, sugar, cool drinks, 'pickle hamburgers', and other luxury items is also discussed.

Preliminary figures for nutrient intake indicate that the calorie intake of these children may be adequate but that their protein intake is on the low side, as also that of riboflavin and vitamin C. Their vitamin-A intake appears to be satisfactory. Figures are not yet available for thiamine, nicotinic acid, iron and calcium intake.