

Hello, again! I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Today we talk about food, sleep, getting older, and your health. We all know that fresh fruits and vegetables not only taste good, but they are also very good for you. But in many parts of Africa, particularly in the cities, these important foods are hard to come by. Karen Leggett reports that may be changing.

City gardens are beginning to provide healthy food and money for people in several African countries. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported last year that over half of all people in African cities are living in poor neighborhoods. The report is called "Growing Greener Cities in Africa."

Senegal's capital, Dakar, is home to four million people. The city has several "micro" garden projects, including one at a hospital.

"This is an idea of Professor Papa Salif Sow simply to contribute to improving the quality of food offered to inpatients and I confess that since this noble initiative, we noticed a great improvement for example like weight gain."

Now the Senegalese government and local groups are training people to grow crops on top of buildings and other empty spaces. They grow in containers made from old wooden pallets and car tires. The plants require little water. More than 5,000 families have been shown how to use this technology.

A garden project in the South African city of Johannesburg targets people who have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. A balanced diet is important for people who have HIV. But finding healthy food at a good price can be difficult. Annah Mogoathe digs potatoes out of the ground. She says the food she grows and eats from the garden makes her stronger and healthier.

Lettie Ngubeni directs the Osizweni Community Center near Johannesburg. She says it often takes time to persuade people to see the value of growing vegetables.

“It’s not our culture. And it was difficult at first when we started to change the mind-set of the people. You know in this place, the culture is that you buy, instead of doing the gardens.”

The Osizweni Community Center trains people how to plant and grow crops. They are taught water use management, and can ask questions. The program has already helped about 250 people. Another group has launched a roof-top garden project to help people moving into Johannesburg. Tshediso Phalane is vice president of the Thlago cooperative.

“Because the idea is get a job. And the only way to get a job is to work on a factory. But now we are going to change the mind-set by saying: look you have skills from the homelands. Why can’t you utilize the skills on the rooftop and see what it is we can come up with.”

What they are coming up with includes rows of spinach, beets, celery, strawberries, lemons and figs. Some of the farmers grow food for their own families. They sell extra fruits and vegetables at lower prices than the local markets. Bonyume, a young woman, says working at the rooftop garden has changed the lives of her sons.

“I’m gonna heat my oil, put onions, lots of onions, green peppers. Then I’ll put spinach, salt, I’ll stir, put my Knox cube, then I make my pap on the side, because I don’t have money for meat these days since it’s the middle of the month, but still I don’t go hungry. There’s plate on the table.”

Doreen Khumalo says her garden produces enough to feed 50 people. Now she wants to be partners with a housing company.

“They have 69 buildings. If you plant all the 69 buildings, the city will be green. Everybody would eat healthy.”

Back in Senegal, a rooftop gardener says he is showing his children that you do not have to be wealthy to eat healthy. I’m Karen Leggett.

Are people less happy or more happy the older they get? If you answered more happy, then you were right, at least based on a study in 2008. It found that people generally become happier and experience less worry after age fifty. In fact, it found that by the age of eighty-five, people are happier with their life than they were at eighteen.

The findings came from a Gallup survey of more than three hundred forty thousand adults in the United States in two thousand eight. At that time, the people were between the ages of eighteen and eighty-five.

Arthur Stone in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at Stony Brook University in New York led the study. His team found that levels of stress were highest among adults between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-five. Stress levels dropped sharply after people reached their fifties.

Happiness was highest among the youngest adults and those in their seventies. But the people least likely to report feeling negative emotions were those in their seventies and eighties.

The survey also found that men and women have similar emotional patterns as they grow older. However, women at all ages reported more sadness, stress and worry than men did.

The researchers also considered possible influences like having young children, being unemployed or being single. But they found that influences like these did not affect the levels of happiness and well-being related to age.

So why would happiness increase with age? One theory is that, as people get older, they become more thankful for what they have and have better control of their emotions. They also spend less time thinking about bad experiences. The findings appeared in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Happiness is not the only thing that apparently improves with age. In a study, people in their eighties reported the fewest problems with the quality of their sleep. Researchers surveyed more than one hundred fifty thousand American adults. The study, led by Michael Grandner at the University of Pennsylvania, appeared in the journal Sleep.

The original goal was to confirm the popular belief that aging is connected with increased sleep problems. The survey did find an increase during middle age, especially in women. But except for that, people reported that they felt their sleep quality improved as they got older.

All of us at VOA hope you eat well, sleep well, and age well. And we thank you for spending some time with us on this Thursday, the 13th day of June.

On this date in 1903, one of America's greatest football players was born. His name was Red Grange, and people called him the "Galloping Ghost."

Also on this date, way back in 1884, the people of New York City headed out of town to Coney Island to escape the summer's heat. When they arrived at the beach, they saw an unusual site. America's first roller coaster was open for business. Passengers sat on a moving bench and rode down 180 meters. Tickets cost only 5 cents.

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