

# Poor nutrition, unsafe food leave teens prone to ulcers

**Feeding.** Irregular eating patterns and excessive intake of spicy, oily, or unhygienic foods can irritate the stomach lining and lead to ulcers.

BY KURTHUM NAMIRO

Health experts are warning that poor eating habits, unsafe food handling, and the consumption of contaminated foods are putting students' health at risk.

This follows reports that teenagers in many schools are facing serious nutritional challenges said to be behind increasing cases of stomach ulcers, upsets and other food-borne illnesses, such as brucellosis.

Many students skip breakfast before going to school and later depend on cheap street foods, sugary snacks, and poorly prepared meals sold around school compounds.

Medical experts say that irregular eating patterns and excessive intake of spicy, oily, or unhygienic foods can irritate the stomach lining and lead to ulcers and other digestive complications.

According to Dr Isma Tamale Mugerwa, a health nutritionist, parents play a major role in the nutritional problems

affecting children.

"Parents pack a lot of unsafe products for children, prompting them to ignore the healthy foods provided at school and instead depend on junk foods around school premises," Dr Mugerwa said.

Unsafe dairy products have also become a growing concern.

Dr Mugerwa explained that brucellosis is a bacterial disease commonly spread through unpasteurized milk and dairy products from infected animals.

He noted that contaminated dairy products cause fever, stomach discomfort, and other health complications.

Health experts are also concerned about food additives and local delicacies such as 'oddii' (derived from peanut butter) and 'appeta,' (a derivative of several cooking fat, and spices), which are sometimes mixed into food.

While some communities consider them harmless, health officials warn that the unhygienic conditions products in which they are prepared or sold

without proper regulation may expose consumers to harmful bacteria and chemicals.

Dr Mugerwa explained that many teenagers unknowingly consume un-



**Lack of concern.** Parents pack a lot of unsafe products for children, prompting them to ignore the healthy foods provided at school and instead depend on junk foods around school premises," Dr Isma Tamale Mugerwa, a health nutritionist

**Poor feeding habits.** My mum doesn't give me any pocket money for breakfast, and I end up waiting for lunch provided by the school, which is also little. I remain hungry the whole day, and this may trigger ulcers," John Mbowa, a student

safe foods because of limited awareness and poor supervision.

"Students often buy food from roadside vendors without checking how the food is prepared or stored," he said. "Some of these foods may contain contaminated milk, unsafe water, or additives that can cause stomach infections and long-term health complications."

However, the students blame their eating conditions at home for their persistent stomach problems.

"My mum doesn't give me any pocket money for breakfast, and I end up waiting for lunch provided by the school, which is also little. I remain hungry the whole day, and this may trigger ulcers," said John Mbowa, a student.

Dr Mugerwa emphasised that although there are several factors responsible for their nutritional challenges, learners should also understand the food types suitable for their bodies.

He added that nutrition experts can guide people on healthy feeding habits after carrying out health assessments.

"We test the blood through different phases and recommend food to people according to their body needs because what is important for one person's body may not be suitable for another," he explained.

## Sensitisation

Education experts are now calling for stronger food safety inspections in schools, improved nutrition education, and regular health screening for students.

Parents have also been encouraged to provide balanced meals and teach children about the dangers of consuming unsafe food products.

Dr Mugerwa is now urging parents to take their children to nutrition experts before returning them to school in order to understand what foods are safe and healthy for them.

He believes that with proper awareness, hygiene, and healthy eating habits, many of these preventable illnesses among teenagers can be reduced or prevented.