

## **Tucking into Tuck-shops**

School years are a time of rapid growth and learning for children, and it is at this time that good nutrition plays a vital role in ensuring that they reach their full potential. Sadly, however, a child's nutritional needs are often overlooked and underplayed by both parents and the school system, resulting in common problems such as behavioral disorders and childhood obesity.

Childhood obesity is a term that you may be familiar with. It's been mentioned quite often in the media but mostly it's a major problem in developed countries such as America. Right? Wrong! In South Africa, 17% of children between the ages 1 – 9 years old are overweight. The term overweight refers to someone that has more body weight than normal after adjustments for height, body build and age have been considered.

It's quite a sobering thought. Our lifestyles make it very easy to let our healthy habits slip. Many fast food and soft drink manufactures target children through the media. Fast food commercials played during children's programmes, the gimmicky toys accompanying fast food meals, strategically placed sweet isles (in perfect eye level with your children) on the way to the supermarket cash register and even some school tuck-shops, are providing a means to make South African children fatter.

Research has shown that there is a connection between a healthy diet and:

- A child's capacity to learn and perform optimally,
- Improving sports performance,
- Decreasing or preventing the development of obesity,
- Minimising hyperactive behaviour,
- Promoting healthy growth and development, and
- Preventing the development of diseases of lifestyle at an early age and later in life.

This has prompted the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (HSFSA) to launch a new Tuck-shop programme. It is a free service and the HSFSA commits to:

- Provide the schools with assistance, advice and guidance as to how to make the tuck-shop healthier,
- Provide training to tuck-shop staff, and
- Provide a quarterly newsletter via e-mail which contains useful tips on how to adapt to a healthier lifestyle.

The main objective of the Tuck-shop programme is to enable children to make healthier choices when faced with a range of options. To achieve this we strive to encourage school tuck-shops to serve more nutritious snacks and meals.

If you would like more information on the Tuck-shop programme, please contact Melissa Zwart on Tel: 021 447 4222 or email [melissa@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto:melissa@heartfoundation.co.za)

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