



Media Release:
Obesity – the silent killer

Obesity is often caused by an imbalance in energy intake (i.e. what you eat and what you drink) and rarely caused by hormonal problems or slow metabolism. According to the South African Medical Research Council, among the South African adult population, more than **29% of men** and **56% of women** are classified as overweight or obese. **17% of SA children** between the ages of 1-9 years are overweight; these statistics are staggering.

National Obesity Week is celebrated between the **12th and 18th October** to create awareness of the obesity disease, often referred to as the “silent killer”. Millions of South Africans lead bodily fatal lifestyles because of a lack of knowledge. The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA’s goal during *National Obesity Week* is to enlighten the public of the disease and encourage all to adopt an overall healthy lifestyle, which involves a well balanced daily diet and physical activity. The HSFSA has committed itself to providing the public free blood pressure testing to ensure that the community is aware of the risk factors.

Overweight and obesity are commonly defined using the body mass index (BMI) and measures of waist circumference. A person who has a BMI of equal to or greater than 25 is classified as overweight while someone having a BMI of equal to or greater than 30 is regarded as obese. A **high risk waistline** puts one at greater risk for developing diabetes, cardiovascular disease and hypertension. For women, a waist line greater than 80cm and for men greater than 94cm is classified as high risk.

The dangers of obesity:

- ♥ *Lifestyle diseases:* such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, osteo-arthritis, sleep apnea and certain cancers.
- ♥ *Psychosocial Difficulties:* Discrimination, negative self image and decreased socialisation.

According to HSFSA Community Dietician, Ayesha Seedat, the most common environmental influences of obesity are:

- ♥ School environments i.e. unhealthy food choices in tuck shops/ vending machines.
- ♥ Our home environments - access to unhealthy snacks in the home.
- ♥ Restaurants & take-aways – increased consumption of these foods as opposed to home cooked nutritious meals.
- ♥ The general availability of high fat, high salt, sugar laden foods & snacks.
- ♥ Lack of access to safe areas for physical activity.
- ♥ Lack of / inadequate nutrition and physical education in some schools.
- ♥ Increased sedentary activities by children and adults i.e. Too much TV time, play station games, computer access, long hours on cell phones (MXIT), etc.

What is the HSFSA doing to assist with the problem?

- ♥ Launch of a **Tuck-shop programme** designed to address the problem of unhealthy eating amongst our children. It requires that schools set nutrition standards for all foods sold at school, including foods in vending machines and tuck-shops. HSFSA registered Dieticians will suggest changes to school tuck-shops and lunches; including increased offerings of fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods; providing more baked foods instead of deep fried foods; placing limits on the fat, sugar and caloric content of foods served.
- ♥ Blood Pressure Screenings nationally (nutritional counselling).
- ♥ Community Talks.
- ♥ Media advertising on radio, TV, magazines, newspapers, intranet.
- ♥ Heart Mark Diet Line - offering FREE nutritional advice.
- ♥ Education pamphlets, health articles and heart healthy Recipe books – available on www.heartfoundation.co.za

- ♥ Hearty Schools programme - Educating Teachers on modules: Nutrition & Exercise.
- ♥ Heart Mark portfolio - Restaurant Programme and Heart Mark products – providing shoppers with a guideline of heart healthy food products.

What can you do to achieve a healthy weight?

- ♥ Set reasonable and realistic goals for weight loss.
- ♥ Self-motivation is very important. Work at changing your lifestyle to improve health, not just looks.
- ♥ Avoid fad or crash diets! They cannot sustain your weight loss in the long run so inevitably you will regain all fat lost.
- ♥ Reduce the amount of food energy taken in **and** increase the amount of energy used by increasing day-to-day levels of physical activity.
- ♥ Dietary recommendations should be practical and easy to implement and should focus on small stepped changes.
- ♥ Reduce fat, sugar and salt in the diet.
- ♥ Maintain a diet high in vegetables, legumes, fruit and whole grain cereals.
- ♥ Avoid large portion sizes.
- ♥ Limit or avoid alcohol consumption!! Limit alcohol intake to 1 drink for women and 2 for men per day, and choose drinks that are lower in energy (kJ) such as dry wine, 'light' beers and spirits diluted with soda water.
- ♥ Develop a daily exercise programme.
- ♥ Eat breakfast. People who skip breakfast are more prone to obesity.
- ♥ Use fish 3 or more times a week, as long as it's not fried. Fish is a healthy protein option that is low in fat.
- ♥ Implement healthy cooking methods such as steaming, boiling, grilling and baking.
- ♥ Limit extra fats (cream, butter, mayonnaise, margarine, oil and dressings).
- ♥ Fibre makes you feel fuller for longer. Increase your intake by using whole wheat bread and pasta, brown rice, oats, etc.
- ♥ Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- ♥ Limit your salt intake. It makes your body retain water.
- ♥ Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day.

Remember, losing weight takes time but the results are worth the changes. Weight loss of ½kg - 1kg per week will ensure that it's fat (not water) being lost.

The benefits of Exercise?

- ♥ Exercise promotes the loss of fat tissue and limits the amount of muscle tissue lost during weight reduction.
- ♥ Exercise may prevent the fall in metabolic rate experienced when dieting and with ageing.
- ♥ Regular exercise may limit appetite.
- ♥ Regular exercise reduces the likelihood of relapse or of regaining lost weight;
- ♥ Exercise, independent of weight loss, assists in the prevention and management of diabetes and hypertension.

The type of exercise that should be done includes: brisk walking, jogging, cycling and swimming (aerobic exercise), as well as some light weight training to ensure that you don't lose muscle – since it's your muscle that helps burn fat even when you're not exercising.

The HSFSa implores all overweight or obese South Africans to take action and become aware of the dangers of obesity, and develop a healthy eating and exercise plan that suits their individuality.

Don't be destroyed by the "silent killer" – live your best life today!

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The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa is a Section 21 community-based organisation established to reduce the incidence of heart disease and stroke in the population of South Africa by providing education, funding and supporting research.