



Power up for Heart Awareness Month

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) is powering up this September for Heart Awareness Month (HAM) as we aim to reach the global goal of reducing premature deaths from cardiovascular disease (CVD) by 25% by the year 2025.

Why a whole month for HAM?

Heart disease is the world's number one killer, claiming nearly 17 million lives every year. Although the incidence of heart disease has steadily declined in high-income countries, the burden on middle and low-income countries has never been greater. In South Africa, the burden of heart disease and stroke follows HIV and AIDS.

In South Africa 1 in every 5 deaths are caused by heart diseases and strokes, totaling nearly 82 000 lives lost annually. Despite advances in medical care, contributing factors such as high blood pressure, obesity, a poor diet, lack of exercise and pollution are all on the rise. Tobacco use has decreased, but 37% of men and 7% of women in South Africa are still regular smokers, tripling their risk of heart disease. Heart disease in South Africa is further exacerbated by inequality. While high blood pressure is common across socio-economic groups, awareness and appropriate treatment is much lower among people living in poverty. Making healthier choices to eat better, stop smoking or to get active are far less achievable to South Africans trapped in poverty.

Is South Africa ready for 25 by 25?

The World Health Organization has set 9 global targets to address lifestyle-related diseases. One of these goals is a 25% reduction in premature heart disease and a 25% reduction in blood pressure by 2025. Can this be achieved within the South African context?

Over the last 25 years, neither heart disease nor blood pressure levels have improved in South

Africa. In fact, given that more people are overweight and have high blood pressure (hypertension) now than ever before, South Africa may even see an increase in heart disease as overweight, obesity and hypertension are known contributors to cardiovascular (CVD) disease.

To reduce the burden of heart disease, we need to encourage lifestyle changes in SA. This starts with encouraging South Africans to eat nutritious food, drink less alcohol, exercise more, manage day-to-day stress and giving up tobacco smoking. Early detection and diagnosis of CVD, treatment of hypertension, raised cholesterol (especially bad cholesterol-LDL), and managing diabetes can further help to prevent the onset of heart disease. Together, these factors can prevent up to 80% of all heart diseases before the age of 70 years if the individuals affected adopt healthy behaviors.

Heart Awareness Month (HAM) is earmarked by the HSFSA every year to encourage South Africans to re-evaluate their heart health and to start adopting healthy behaviors, to take back control, and *Power Their Lives*.

Getting to the Hearts of Young People in SA

The damage inside blood vessels that leads to most heart disease already starts in childhood. Healthy lifestyles in childhood therefore has a direct positive effect on heart health, but even more importantly, it often creates a blueprint for lifestyle choices made in adulthood.

Ten percent (10%) of boys and 22% of girls between the ages of 10 and 14 years are overweight. One South African study found girls who were obese between the ages of 4 and 8, were 40 times more likely to be obese when they finished high school. Numerous primary school children eat unhealthy foods on a daily basis, and don't participate in enough physical activity.

To start Heart Awareness Month, the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa is raising awareness among young South Africans of the importance of keeping their hearts healthy. The HSFSA selected 13 schools, nationally, to participate in the *Skip Smart for your Heart Schools Programme* between August and September 2017.

The *Skip Smart for your Heart Schools Programme* aims to inform primary school children about the importance of their heart and brain health and how they can do to take care of these vital organs by eating smart, breathing fresh air, avoiding tobacco smoke and being physically active. Children will be further encouraged to exercise by being given a free skipping rope and a guest appearance from Hearty, the HSFSA mascot.

The presentation teaches simple exercise moves taught by our mascot, Hearty! Hearty enacts 5 simple but necessary exercises we can all use daily. Finally, the HSFSA will showcase a performance from a professional skipper to captivate the learners with extraordinary tricks and skills using a mere skipping rope, thus making *moving more* a cool and aspirational thing to do.

Moreover, the staff at the 13 selected schools will have a Health Risk Assessment conducted by our health promotions officers and nurse practitioners.

Caring for adult hearts - get tested for free

Less than 50% of South Africa adults living with high blood pressure (hypertension) are unaware of their condition. The prevalence of hypertension is said to be around 45% among adults. Similarly, many people who are pre-diabetic and have raised cholesterol are unaware, and as a result do not improve their lifestyles nor gain access to medication. Blood pressure should be checked at least annually for all adults, and blood glucose annually when overweight. Many people are unaware of the dangers of hypertension, prefer to postpone getting a medical check or, simply cannot afford to get tested.

Professor Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the HSFSA, urges all South Africans to have a Health Risk Assessment (which includes checking their blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol levels and weight) done free during HAM at all Dis-Chem Pharmacies. Prof Naidoo expresses her gratitude to Dis-Chem Pharmacies for partnering with the HSFSA to raise awareness of CVD and to mobilize communities to know their diagnosis and get treatment when necessary.

The HSFSA's buildup to World Heart Day

During HAM, the HSFSA will focus on lifestyle factors which have a major impact on one's risk for developing heart disease. Each week there will be a focus on important risk factors. These focus areas are detailed below:

1. **Your body does not want the extra salt:** To encourage the reduction of extra salt for your heart health, we will be running a Salt Reduction Campaign from 1 - 8 September funded by the National Lotteries Fund (NLC) and supported by the National Department of Health (NDOH).
2. **Keep it light: bring obesity down:** Emphasizing how physical activity and healthy eating go hand in hand. We need to evaluate what we eat, portion control, healthy eating should not be a 'diet' but rather a lifestyle, the importance of physical activity in conjunction to eating well, how much exercise is enough, and simple ways to incorporate this into everyday life.
3. **You can do it:** This unappealing habit can be conquered, we can help with smoking cessation and also dispel any myths and misconceptions associated with tobacco smoking. Tobacco smoking is one of the biggest drivers of CVD.

4. Power up on 29th September, World Heart Day!

The HSFSA, together with key staff at UCT's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences will be involved in activities aligned with the World Heart Federation's mission and vision to bring to South Africa's attention that we can work together to reduce the burden of heart disease. We will light up iconic landmarks on World Heart Day (WHD) as we drive the global goal of reducing premature deaths from CVD by 25% by the year 2025. Watch

the press for more details on WHD. We explore risk factor reduction and influencing the Behavioural and uptake of health risk assessments.

#CheckyourPower

This year we have once again partnered with Dis-Chem Pharmacies who will make available free testing in their stores across South Africa - please call 08601 (HEART) 43278 for more Information. Free health risk assessments offered at Dis-Chem during September and October will include blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol levels, and body mass index.

Ends

Interviews will be conducted with our CEO, Prof Pamela Naidoo, our dietitians, health promoters, and relevant experts. To co-ordinate and confirm interview dates you are welcome to contact the Public Relations and Communications department on 021-422 1586 or email:

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About the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) plays a leading role in the fight against preventable heart disease and stroke, with the aim of seeing fewer people in South Africa suffer premature deaths and disabilities. The HSFSA, established in 1980 is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which relies on external funding to sustain the work it carries out.

The HSFSA aims to reduce the cardiovascular disease (CVD) burden in South Africa and ultimately on the health care system of South Africa. Our mission is to empower people in South Africa to adopt healthy lifestyles, make healthy choices easier, seek appropriate care and encourage prevention.

For more information, contact the Heart and Stroke Health Line on 0860 1 HEART (43278) or visit www.heartfoundation.co.za. You can also find us on www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA and www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke



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