



THE HEART
AND STROKE
FOUNDATION
SOUTH AFRICA

Valentine's Day - Love is in the Brain #LoveYourBrain

Valentine's Day is all about love - falling in love, being loved and showing love. The question, however, is - where does love come from, the heart or the brain? In the end, there is no right or wrong answer because without one another neither will function. Prof Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa makes a point that the reason we are highlighting the connection between the heart and the brain is due to the fact that generally speaking most individuals see these two organs as separate entities. At the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa, we understand the importance of both of these vital organs and continue to work towards creating awareness around the intricate biological connection between our hearts and brains.

The two organs communicate via the muscular walls around the heart, which are connected to the brain in the circulatory system. As the brain releases hormones telling the body what to do, receptor cells in your blood vessels pick up these messages. In addition, there are nerve endings that travel from the brain to the muscular walls of the heart. These nerves send messages to the muscle tissue to either relax or contract. Since these two organs are biologically linked, mental health can also have a significant effect on heart health and vice versa.

What is stress?

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses. The body responds to stress by raised blood pressure and heart rate. When you experience the stress response on a regular and consistent basis the body is placed at an increased risk for heart disease and strokes.

What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease refers to a group of conditions that affect the structure and functioning of the heart. It has many root causes. The most common of heart diseases is a heart attack, which happens when a blood clot blocks the blood flow and oxygen to the heart.

What is a stroke?

Stroke is a disease that affects the blood vessels to and within the brain. It is caused by a small blood clot that may form in a blood vessel then block an artery in the brain. This interrupts the blood flow and oxygen supply to the brain and may cause the brain cells to die. Stroke may cause severe and lasting disability and death.

The risk factors for strokes and heart diseases include stress, smoking, nutrition, physical activity, body weight, alcohol use, diabetes, cholesterol and blood pressure. The good news is that most risk factors for both heart disease and stroke are controllable and can be managed by implementing basic lifestyle modifications. While the Heart and Stroke Foundation encourages you to spread love on Valentine's Day, we would also like you to take care of your heart and brain health.

So, as the day of love approaches, love yourself more arming yourself with knowledge and knowing the symptoms. The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa recommend that we go the extra mile this Valentine's Day - the most valuable gift you can give your loved one is a healthy heart and brain, and to adopt "Love as a healthy habit".

Instead of the usual chocolates and flowers, couples, friends and families, can participate in fun physical activities that allow them to strengthen their relationships as well as their heart and brain health.

Valentine's Day is the perfect opportunity to initiate such programmes and to spend much needed time together. Physical activities assist in countering anxiety and depression, lowering your blood pressure and improving your cholesterol level and consequently reducing the risk of heart attacks and strokes. Our dietitians and health promotions officers at the Foundation highlight the fact that we need to consider living a holistic lifestyle and limit fast foods and unhealthy health behaviours.

We at the HSFSa continue our annual fundraising events which are targeted at the youth because we know good health starts at a young age. Schools engage by hosting our team to sell off iconic branded Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa button badges in support and awareness of the mission and vision of our Foundation. The funds raised through the selling of our button badges, will all go towards our School Health Promotions Initiative (SHPI), where our team visit various schools especially in underserved communities around South Africa to raise awareness among the youth on the importance of living a healthy lifestyle and to encourage the staff to know their health status by undergoing a health risk assessment.

End

Interviews will be conducted with our Health Promotions Team, Dieticians and CEO, Professor Pamela Naidoo and other 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

Sasha Forbes

PR, Communications & Marketing Officer

Email: sasha.forbes@heartfoundation.co.za

Jodine Rhooide

PR & Communications Intern

Email: jodine.rhooide@heartfoundation.co.za

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 visit www.heartfoundation.co.za. You can also find us on www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA, www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke and www.instagram.com/heartstrokesa

