



SOUTH AFRICAN  
NON-COMMUNICABLE  
DISEASES ALLIANCE



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **WORLD OBESITY DAY, 4 MARCH 2021**

World Obesity Day (WOD), driven by the World Obesity Federation (WOF) is a global campaign, observed annually on the 4th of March, to raise awareness around various health factors contributing to obesity. The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA), a member of the WOF is working together with the South African Non-Communicable Disease Alliance (SANCD), the National Department of Health (NDOH), and other organizations around the world to spread the WOD 2021 message “Everybody Needs Everybody. This is a way of emphasizing that obesity is not only a lifestyle condition but can be observed as a complex disease that increases the risks of other health problems and diseases, such as heart diseases, diabetes, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, skeletal problems, sleep apnea, COVID-19, reproductive problems, and certain cancers.

The ‘Everybody’ campaign is about coming together and calling upon everybody to acknowledge that obesity is a disease. We call on broader society, governments, policymakers, food industries, healthcare professionals, and corporations to play their part in combating this crisis and not contribute to it. Everybody needs healthcare, access to healthy food, protection from those who benefit from promoting unhealthy lifestyles. Obesity is not just about individuals, everybody should acknowledge it, play their part in creating a safer and healthier environment that doesn’t discriminate against people with obesity.

Obesity is defined as an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat in the body, that can have adverse effects on health as it affects adults and children equally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) obesity report of April 2020, the global prevalence of obesity is 1.9 billion people overweight, 800 million people obese, and 340 million children obese. In the South African context, there are an estimate of 31% men, 68% women, and 13% children classified as overweight or obese (according to Statistics SA, 2020).

We are in the middle of an obesity epidemic, and COVID-19 has layered a crisis on a crisis. If we are to move forward, it has to be together. The HSFSA acknowledges the rapidly evolving COVID-19 research and the growing evidence that is linking COVID-19 with Obesity. Obesity is the main

risk factor for comorbidities such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and CVD and it has been widely acknowledged that these comorbidities are associated with a more severe course of the virus. However, some recent reports have also shown a strong association between obesity and the severity of COVID-19 infection despite the absence of other comorbidities. Furthermore, clinical evidence is linking obesity to worse outcomes in patients with COVID-19 where there is an increased risk for the development of severe pneumonia.

The WHO has developed the “Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD’s) 2013 - 2020”, which aims to achieve the commitments of the UN Political Declaration on NCD’s and contribute to attaining the targets by 2025, including a 25% reduction in premature mortality from NCD’s by 2025 and halt the rise of global obesity.

Dr. Vicki Pinkney-Atkinson, Director for the SANCDA, says “obesity is a complex health condition and requires comprehensive solutions, treatment, and collective responsibility to treat and we need to understand that!”

Professor Pamela Naidoo, CEO of HSFSa adds *“Understanding your environment and the causes of obesity can help us adapt and make behavioural changes despite the challenges that we face. We encourage people to seek out opportunities to live healthier, increase activity levels and eat better. We will continue to work towards a healthier environment for all South Africans. “Knowing that obesity is not entirely your fault’ can be empowering.’*

The HSFSa endorsement program which includes the Heart Mark and Diabetes South Africa (DSA) programs is one such tool that makes it easier for members of the public to purchase or make healthier food choices when faced with a variety of options at the supermarket. It helps consumers identify healthier products that contain less added sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats, and more fibre compared to other similar products. The Foundations Health Promotion Manager, Dana Govender, and Nutrition Team Leader, Hayley Cimring encourage South Africans to consume food products that are recommended by the Foundation as part of a healthy meal plan.

Prof Naidoo encourages members of the public to access the information on our website and attend the webinar we have planned for WOD 2021.

**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](mailto:sasha.forbes@heartfoundation.co.za)

**WhatsApp Number:** 076 775 6652

**Jodine Rhoode**

PR & Communications Intern

**Email:** [jodine.rhoode@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto:jodine.rhoode@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](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za). You can also find us on [www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA](https://www.facebook.com/HeartStrokeSA), [www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke](https://www.twitter.com/SAHeartStroke) and [www.instagram.com/heartstrokesa](https://www.instagram.com/heartstrokesa)