



THE HEART
AND STROKE
FOUNDATION
SOUTH AFRICA



Employee Wellness Week
3 - 7 July 2023

CELEBRATING
42 YEARS OF
HEART & BRAIN HEALTH



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FOUNDATION EATING PLAN

Press Release

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Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa commemorates Employee Wellness Week (3rd to 7th July)

Employee Wellness Week, is an annual national health event designed to bring awareness of the importance of maintaining the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace and within their home environment. The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) uses this week to highlight the importance of heart and brain health, as well as the associated risk factors given that CVD has a very high burden of disease in SA.

The World Health Organization (WHO) constitution states: *"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."* South Africa is faced with a quadruple burden of disease where Non- Communicable Diseases [NCDs] which include heart disease strokes, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, injuries and accidents, as well as maternal, newborn and child health are co-existing and many individuals have co-and multimorbidity.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), namely heart disease, strokes and other circulatory disease diseases, have the highest burden of NCDs in South Africa. An estimated 80% of CVDs can be prevented by adopting healthy behaviors and maintaining this behaviour pattern consistently. Improving well-being in the workplace has been a goal of many employment agencies for many years, and there is universal agreement that a healthy workforce is productive with an increased sense of overall well-being. Many employees suffer from "burnout" as a result of a demanding job, and this interferes with carrying out daily activities, thus affecting productivity. This was particularly prominent among health-care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prof Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the HSFSA states that: "Unfortunately, many companies are unaware of the health status of their workforce, which is counterproductive. She, therefore, encourages those in management to have regular health awareness and health risk assessment sessions which can be conducted by the Foundation".

Working long hours, according to a study done by the WHO and International Labour Organization in 2021, which included 13 countries in three WHO regions (Americas, Europe and Western Pacific), is known to be responsible for about one-third of the total estimated work-related burden of disease, and was the leading cause of death from strokes and heart disease. The study concludes that working 55 or more hours per week is associated with an estimated 35% higher risk of a

stroke and a 17% higher risk of dying from ischemic heart disease, compared to working 35-40 hours a week.

Throughout Employee Wellness Week, the HSFSA aspires to educate the private and the public sector employers and employees about the importance of wellness in the workplace and in their homes. The HSFSA's health promotion and disease prevention programmes, focussing on heart and brain health, are essential to creating employee well-being. The HSFSA conducts health risk assessments (HRA'S), an important pillar of the Foundation's health promotion programme. The HRA's include assessing family history, current health status, as well as measuring blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood glucose levels, Body Mass Index (BMI), mental health assessment, and appropriate men and women's health issues. The HRAs are a way of ascertaining who is at risk so that they can be referred for appropriate medical care. The assessments can be accompanied by a health talk by our certified professionals to help employees understand that being healthy is about long term life choices and habits. Most importantly, we offer ways to create a healthy environment to promote productivity and reduce absenteeism in the workplace. We also have valuable information leaflets to disseminate. We have a strong Nutrition pillar which is a very attractive topic for families with children within various ages and stages.

The Heart Mark endorsement programme is part of ongoing efforts by the HSFSA to reduce the number of deaths in South Africa from preventable heart disease and strokes. The endorsement programme forms part of a health-enabling environment offering consumers a tool which makes choosing healthier foods easier. Our market research shows that 8 in 10 (or 77%) consumers instantly recognise the Heart Mark logo, these consumers associate the logo with healthy eating and a sense of credibility and therefore it increases the trustworthiness of the Heart Mark endorsement products. Approved by the National Department of Health, the endorsement program works with food manufacturers to improve food formulation. It is not a diet, but rather, a guaranteed way to buy food lower in salt, sugar and saturated fats and higher in fiber. The Foundation aims to highlight the Heart Mark endorsed products during Employee Wellness Week.

Sustaining healthy employees occurs in an enabling environment in a healthy work environment. . Stress can stem from different demands at work, including deadlines, long working hours, complicated by difficulties within the home environment or community and public spaces. Violence and unsafe spaces add to employee's overall stress. Stress becomes harmful when it is excessive, chronic and poorly managed. Experiencing high levels of stress often leads to unhealthy behaviors, of which most of them are major risk factors for heart disease and strokes, such as consuming foods high in salt, sugar and fats; excessive alcohol consumption, tobacco smoking and/or vaping and lack of physical activity.

Employers are encouraged to provide employees with the necessary resources and support and the use of flexi hours (if this is appropriate for the sector) for the promotion of the well-being of their employees. .

Not only do healthy employees increase productivity at their places of work , but the overall wellbeing and quality of life for those employees increases. There are

various ways to ensure your organization contributes to the wellbeing in the workplace. Contact the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA to arrange interviews, talks and HRAs (screening) where we will be able to share strategies for improving employee wellness.

Interviews will be conducted with our Health Promotions Team, Dietitians and CEO, Professor Pamela Naidoo. To co-ordinate and confirm interview dates you are welcome to contact Themba Mzondi, our PR and Media Liaison Coordinator on 021 422 1586 / 0781135216 or email themba.mzondi@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