



Press Release

29 January 2024

## **Trust your gut for good heart and brain health this Valentine's Month**

Globally, February is celebrated as a month of love due to the fact that Valentine's Day is on the 14th February. At the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA), we use the month of February to increase the awareness of the importance of heart and brain health. Moreover, we use the month of February for our fund-raising drive to help us sustain our work-streams for health promotion, disease prevention, health advocacy, health education and community-based outreach. The Foundation wants the population at large to understand that the heart and brain are very interconnected organs. Consequently, love is not only associated with the heart but also the brain! There has been an increase in scientific evidence over the years, which also illustrates the relationship between good gut health and good brain health. The Foundation has consistently conveyed the health message related to good nutrition and cardiovascular disease.

More on the gut-brain connection: The gut microbiota is in constant interaction with the human host. Furthermore, it represents an ecosystem vulnerable to influences from the environment. Over the years, the brain-gut axis concept has evolved and illustrated connections to both the nervous system pathways as well as hormonal pathways and internal brain connections that exist between cognitive and emotional functions. The central nervous system and the gut are physiologically unable to be dissociated. Neural structures present at and linking both sites are similar. The significance of the brain-gut axis is best seen as "a team". Both systems are physiologically coordinated to ensure a healthy status. It is due to these connections that stressful life events can influence gut-brain signaling and cause alterations of meal tolerance, intestinal dysfunction, cognitive and task performance. This gut-brain connection helps explain the effectiveness of irritable bowel syndrome and bowel-disorder treatments such as antidepressants as well as mind-body therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and medical hypnotherapy. Specialists have gone as far as stating that "Our two brains 'talk' to each other, so therapies that help one may help the other.

At the global and South African levels, statistics highlight the burden of CVD. Cardiovascular and cerebrovascular conditions (CVD), are the leading causes of death and disability within the non-communicable disease cluster in South Africa. CVD is responsible for almost one (1) in six (6) deaths, claiming more lives than that of all cancers combined. Every day, 225 South Africans die from heart disease and strokes.

The Foundation plays a pivotal role in educating South Africans from all walks of life, including our family, friends and colleagues, about adopting healthier behaviors. In order to meet our mission, the Foundation

has several outreach programmes which include: the Mended Hearts and Stroke Groups, School Health Promotion Initiative (SHPI), Fast Heroes for stroke prevention, and Health Risk Assessments (HRAs). To help with easier food choices, the Heart Mark Endorsement Programme is a very important part of our nutrition pillar.

Each programme is tailored for the target group. Prevention is always better than cure and we could just as easily lose workforce due to heart disease or strokes as to any other disease. Workplace wellness programs aim to prevent chronic diseases and improve the productivity of employees. Such programs allow the employees to view the access to and provision of wellness programs as a sign of commitment to health and well-being from the employer's perspective. The Foundation extends our health promotion programmes to the private sector at a cost.



APPROVED AS PART OF  
THE HEART AND STROKE  
FOUNDATION EATING PLAN

Highlighting our Heart Mark endorsement programme, a flagship of the Foundation, it forms part of a health-enabling environment offering consumers a tool which makes choosing healthier foods easier. The Heart Mark logo helps consumers identify healthier food options and at the same time advocate against food manufacturers that flood the market with unhealthy products, which contribute substantially to the rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, overweight and obesity.

We urge everyone to show genuine love to their nearest and dearest, friends and colleagues by empowering them and giving them the tools to be present and healthy. We not only ask individuals, but also companies, to work together with the Foundation and help amplify the impact of the HSFSAs programmes. As a non profit health organization, the HSFSA relies on donor funding to meet its sustainability needs in order to continue the work for many more decades to come and to reach new frontiers through our invaluable work and data collection. You make a difference and show your healthy-heart-love to those around you by donating at:

<https://www.heartfoundation.co.za/donate/>

Interviews will be conducted with our Health Promotions Team, Dieticians and CEO, Professor Pamela Naidoo. To co-ordinate and confirm interview dates you are welcome to contact Mr. Themba Mzondi, our PR and Communications Officer on 021 422 1586 / 078 113 5216 or email [themba.mzondi@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto: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](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)