



THE HEART
AND STROKE
FOUNDATION
SOUTH AFRICA



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FOUNDATION EATING PLAN

Press Release

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The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa commemorates World Obesity Day: 4th March

World Obesity Day (WOD) is acknowledged globally on an annual basis on March 4th. The World Obesity Federation (WOF) and its member organizations mobilize to create awareness about obesity being documented as a medical condition, and therefore, not to be taken lightly. Prof Naidoo, the Foundation's CEO makes the point that the increasing rates of obesity in South Africa and globally, is alarming due to the fact that overweight and obesity present as key risk factors for other non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, strokes, cancers and diabetes type II.

The 2025 theme, "*Changing Systems, Healthier Lives*", highlights the need to shift our focus from individual behaviors to the broader systems that shape health outcomes. Ms Shonisani Nephalama and Cari Erasmus, the HSFSA's dietitians state that the theme highlights multiple systems, including health systems, government systems, food systems, the media, and the environments we work and live in, all of which contribute to the increasing rates of obesity worldwide, including in South Africa. As emphasised by the WOF, "We must also recognise obesity as a complex, and chronic disease, and one that is also a driver of other diseases. Taking action on obesity is a critical step in reducing the global burden of other chronic diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer".

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) and its local partners, National Department of Health, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, World Health Organization and Association of Dietetics in South Africa, aligns with the WOF

and their theme for 2025, recognising the need for change at multiple levels to ensure better health outcomes for South Africans. The National Food and Nutrition Security Survey (NFNSS) 2023 reveals alarming overweight and obesity rates in South Africa, with approximately 67.9% of adult women and 38.2% of adult men living with overweight and obesity. As an organisation aiming to reduce the burden of cardio- and cerebrovascular disease (CVD) in South Africa, we recognise that obesity is a major risk factor driving the CVD epidemic. Obesity may increase a person's risk of having a heart attack or stroke, as well as numerous other health problems, including high blood pressure, certain cancers, diabetes, gallstones, sleep apnoea and degenerative joint disease.

By addressing obesity, we can significantly reduce the burden of these chronic diseases and improve the health and wellbeing of South Africans. To achieve this, the WOF states that recognising obesity as a disease is the first step. We need to monitor and track its impact, provide prevention and treatment services in local healthcare settings, and train healthcare workers to deliver caring support.

Inviting stronger government regulations and policies in the nutrition space is critical. HSFSFA advocates for policies that support the up-take of healthy behaviours among South Africans, with a focus on creating a supportive food environment that acknowledges the critical role of optimal nutrition in weight management. Prof Naidoo makes the point that obesity needs to be considered over the life-course as the rates of obesity among young children is rising, posing a threat to increased levels of type II diabetes. The Foundation is proud to have played an important role in shaping the food policy space. One such example is the sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) tax and front-of-pack nutrition labelling which aim to reduce the consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages that are high in sugar, salt and fats .

The Foundation's Heart Mark endorsement programme plays a vital role in our mission to create a healthier environment for food choices. By providing consumers with a trusted symbol of healthier food options, we empower them to make informed choices. At the Foundation we also recognise the value of regular physical activity to help regulate a healthy body weight. Increasing measures to promote physical activity will have a positive impact on body weight as well as cardiovascular health as a whole.

These measures may include increased public spaces for active recreation and sport as well as fiscal measures to promote physical activity, for example reduced tax on sporting goods and subsidies for extracurricular physical activity programmes. Promoting wellbeing and exercise in the workplace is a key component to employee wellness. The Foundation's employee wellness programme addresses key risk factors including lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, obesity and mental health, in our efforts to promote a healthy workforce.

Juandre Watson, the Health Promotion and Health Risk Assessment Programme Lead, states that the HSFSa plays a pivotal role in guiding people at all stages of life to a healthier self. We accomplish this through our various programs: Mended hearts and Strokes Groups, community health promotion activities, Employee Wellness Programs, media outreach and our health chat line. It is essential that the media reinforces healthy behaviours and addresses the stigma around obesity. The HSFSa, together with our local partners will be hosting a CPD accredited public webinar on "Changing Systems and Obesity: Building Healthier Communities in South Africa", on 04 March, 13:00 - 15:00. The webinar invites the public and health professionals to attend. The link is as follows:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/hUYSYvjfTMGX166I0LPNag>.

The CEO of the HSFSa, Professor Pamela Naidoo, has emphasised the importance of a strong and impactful campaign for WOD as one of the prevention and health awareness measures to protect all South Africans and global citizens. This WOD and throughout the entire month of March, join the HSFSa in keeping the discussion going in understanding the complexity of obesity, while advocating for a change in key systems to ensure healthier lives for all!

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

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

