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45 YEARS OF
HEART & BRAIN HEALTH



THE HEART
AND STROKE
FOUNDATION
SOUTH AFRICA
#Action for CVD reduction



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THE HEART AND STROKE
FOUNDATION EATING PLAN

Press Release

08 May 2025

Get informed, take action! The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa is leading the charge this Salt Awareness Week 2025.

This Salt Awareness Week, 12 - 18 May 2025, the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) is sounding the alarm on the devastating impact of excessive salt consumption on the nation's heart and brain health. This year, the HSFSA aligns with the World Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (WASSH) theme, **"5 Ways to 5 Grams"**. We are highlighting the critical link between salt intake and heart and brain health. This theme provides a clear roadmap to reducing salt consumption and protecting your health. Join us as we shine a spotlight on salt. Our CEO, Prof Pamela Naidoo, wants the public to know the truth about salt and its role in fueling high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, and other circulatory conditions, and to discover how small behavioural changes can significantly impact your brain and heart health.

Ms Shonisani Nephalama, the Foundation's Team Lead for Nutrition Science, states that sodium plays a vital role in maintaining the delicate balance of fluids within the body. When we consume sodium through our diet, it increases the amount of fluid outside our cells, leading to a rise in blood volume. As blood volume expands, the heart has to work harder to pump blood throughout the body, which in turn increases blood pressure. Normally, the kidneys efficiently filter out excess sodium and fluid from the blood, regulating fluid balance and blood pressure. However, when sodium intake is excessively high, it can become challenging for the kidneys to keep up with the demand, leading to a surge in blood pressure and kidney impairment. Prolonged exposure to high blood

pressure can strain the cardiovascular system, increasing the risk of heart disease, stroke, and kidney damage.

Salt, composed of sodium and chloride ions, has sodium accounting for approximately 40% of its weight. Ms Cari Erasmus, the HSFSA's registered dietitian, reminds us that essentially, monitoring salt intake is also about managing sodium levels – a crucial aspect of maintaining overall health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) advises limiting daily sodium intake to under 2300 milligrams, equivalent to about 1 teaspoon (5g) of salt. Exceeding this limit can have detrimental health effects over time, making mindful consumption essential. However, measuring exactly 5g of salt can be tricky, especially in everyday cooking, as many foods, such as ultra-processed food items, already contain significant amounts of sodium. As a practical approach, it's best to err on the side of caution and use less salt when cooking, gradually adjusting to taste. When cooking, try the "salt later" approach: add a small amount of salt towards the end of cooking or at the table, allowing everyone to season to taste. Additionally, taste food before adding salt, since flavors can become more pronounced or blended during cooking. This mindful approach helps develop a preference for less salty flavours, reduces excessive sodium intake, and contributes to better blood pressure management.

Unfortunately, South Africans tend to exceed the recommended daily salt intake of 5g. This excessive consumption significantly increases the risk of developing high blood pressure, a major contributor to cardiovascular disease (CVD), including circulatory conditions, stroke and heart disease – the leading cause of death globally. Furthermore, high salt intake has been linked to other severe health issues, such as kidney disease, osteoporosis, stomach cancer, and obesity. By being aware of salt intake and making informed choices, individuals can take proactive steps towards protecting their health and reducing the risk of these conditions.

The good news is that change is possible, and it starts with us. In South Africa, CVD remains a leading cause of death, accounting for one in every seven deaths in 2021. However, by supporting each other in adopting healthier habits, we can make a powerful impact. Every small step counts, and collective action can lead to significant positive

change. By working together, we can take a giant leap towards a healthier future, saving thousands of lives and reducing CVD morbidity and mortality. During Salt Awareness Week, we're promoting 5 easy ways the public can take action to reduce their salt intake to 5g a day, as outlined by the World Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (WASSH). Imagine a healthier future, starting with a simple change: cutting down on salt. Small behaviour changes to your daily habits can make a big impact on your heart health and risk of stroke. By making informed choices and adopting healthier habits, we can reduce our risk of CVD and create a better future for ourselves and our loved ones.

To get started, try seasoning smart by gradually reducing salt in your favourite recipes. Low-salt dishes can still pack plenty of flavour, so get creative with herbs, raw spices, garlic, ginger, chilli, and lemon. When shopping, become a label reader and opt for low-sodium options – [join our webinar](#) to learn how to decode food labels and look for the Heart Mark logo, our seal of approval. Break the salt habit by ditching the salt shaker and helping your loved ones do the same. A major portion of the salt we eat is hidden in everyday foods like bread, cereals, processed meats, canned goods, and ready meals, as well as in restaurants and fast food. To control your salt intake, try cooking meals at home where you can choose what goes into your food. Load up on nutrient-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lentils, beans, and low-fat dairy. These foods are packed with potassium, a vital mineral that helps maintain healthy blood pressure. Potassium works by counteracting the effects of sodium, promoting its excretion in the urine, and relaxing blood vessels to improve blood flow. This dual action helps regulate blood pressure and supports overall cardiovascular well-being. By incorporating potassium-rich foods into your diet, you can take a proactive step towards maintaining healthy blood pressure levels and reducing the risk of CVD.

The path to a healthier future starts with small, conscious and mindful choices. As the HSFSA's Registered Dietitians, Ms Shonisani Nephalama and Ms Cari Erasmus, emphasise, "reducing salt intake is a simple yet powerful step towards a healthier life." By taking a closer look at our daily food habits and making intentional decisions to cut down on salt, we can collectively make a significant impact. Let's aim for less than 5g of salt per day, as recommended by the WHO, and take a powerful step towards a healthier

future – one that can save thousands of lives. Every small change counts, and together, we can create a healthier tomorrow.

Interviews will be conducted with our CEO, Professor Pamela Naidoo, Health Promotions Team, and Dietitians. 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 organisation 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

We urge the media to join the conversation on social media using:
#SaltAwarenessWeek#5waysto5grams#ReduceSaltSaveLives#HeartHealth#HealthyEating.

