

The **Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa** is eager to reach into your community. Please feel free to publish this information in your company newsletter on your intranet or pin it up on a notice board. All we ask in return is to credit the information as coming from the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA.

A healthy kick-start!

National Nutrition week runs from 9th-13th October 2009 and overlaps with Obesity Week which is from 12-18th October 2009.

The health status of young children is in question as researchers have found that 10% of South African kids under the age of 9 years are overweight, while 4% are obese. The concern with this is that, if untreated, it can lead to other lifestyle diseases later in life like diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and cardiovascular disease. Furthermore, overweight or obese kids are often burdened with psycho-social difficulties including negative self esteem, poor social skills and discrimination. According to the World Health Organisation, 70% of overweight children become overweight adults and hence this warrants the need for intervention as early as possible!

Not only is overnutrition a matter of concern, but undernutrition is also a problem...Stunting and underweight due to malnutrition poses a threat to children's health with South African statistics revealing that 1 in 5 children is stunted while almost 1 out of 10 is underweight. Added to this are major problems of vitamin and mineral deficiencies, with more than half of South African children under the age of 9 years being deficient in Vitamin A and more than 10% iron deficient. With these nutrition challenges on hand, it becomes incumbent for parents, caregivers, child minders as well as kids, to be educated about healthy eating practices.

This year, South Africa is celebrating **National Nutrition Week** from the 9th – 13th October. The theme is '*Healthy eating for children*' - highlighting 3 important key messages:

- Enjoy a variety of foods
- Drink lots of clean, safe water
- Be active

Enjoy a variety of foods

Eating a variety of healthy foods as well as regular meals and snacks will help children attain optimal wellbeing. In addition to variety, all the food groups should be included daily – this ensuring a balanced intake of macro and micronutrients. All foods fit into 5 types:

- Starch
- Vegetables and fruit
- Dairy
- Meat and meat alternatives like legumes, lentils, soya, chicken and fish
- Fats and sugars (add these sparingly to the diet)

Kids spend most of their time in school and so they should be provided with a variety of healthy foods, be it in their lunch box or at the school tuck shop. Some good options include fruit, chopped vegetables with a low fat dip, yoghurt, popcorn, peanuts and dried fruit.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) has a **School Tuck Shop Programme** designed to address the problem of unhealthy eating amongst school children. The main objective of the programme is to enable children to make healthier choices when faced with a range of options. To achieve this, we strive to encourage school tuck shops to serve more nutritious snacks and meals. For more information about this programme, visit our website www.heartfoundation.co.za or email ayesha@heartfoundation.co.za

Drink lots of clean, safe water

Water, a natural calorie free beverage, is sadly often forgotten! Water is required for various functions in our body from preventing constipation, aiding in digestion of food, maintaining a healthy skin to keeping one well hydrated. Kids also need about 6-8 glasses of water per day. Ensure that the water is from a safe source (tap) - if not, the water can be boiled and cooled in a clean container or treated with bleach (add 1 teaspoon of bleach to 20 liters of water and allow to stand for 2 hours before drinking).



Tips for getting children to drink water:

- Give them a bottle of cool clean, safe water to take to school every day
- Serve a glass of water with each meal
- Give children a glass of clean, safe water to drink when they brush their teeth in the morning and evening
- Dilute fruit juice with some water
- Make fruit ice in summer
- For a refreshing drink, add a squeeze of lemon juice or slices of lemon to the water

Be active

Exercise plays a pivotal role in a child's life, be it walking the dog, roller-skating, jogs on the beach, dance classes or playing outdoors with friends. The South African Youth Risk Behaviour Survey of 2002 found that 37.5% of our youth do not participate in physical activity and 25% watch television/are playing computer games for 3 hours or more per day. Limiting time spent on sedentary activities and encouraging more physical activity will definitely do wonders for your child's well being - good heart health, a reduction in weight gain (if overweight), improved self esteem and better sleeping patterns are just some of the benefits that could be reaped. So get your child involved in activity for at least 60 minutes a day or 30 minutes twice a day. Allow them to choose activities they enjoy - this way, they are more likely to do it.

What does the HSFSA recommend?

Encourage healthy habits from a young age to prevent future heart-ache, but more importantly be a role model to your kids. They are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours if they see their parents doing so. Try not to always reward your child with food when he/she has done a favourable task. Parents mean well, but why not a soccer ball, a new swimming costume, new track pants or even a frisbee for a change. So the next time your child does well in school, completes his/her homework, does household chores etc don't offer them dessert, cakes, chocolates or a trip to the nearest fat-laden fast food take-away. Go the extra mile and make it not only personal but also worthwhile for their health by rewarding them with something of significance.

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For more heart smart information, please contact the Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222, email heart@heartfoundation.co.za or visit our website www.heartfoundation.co.za

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