

Healthy environments produce healthy mind sets

In celebration of World Heart Day on 29 September 2014, the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (HSF), in partnership with the World Heart Federation, is putting the spotlight on creating heart-healthy environments, enabling people to make positive changes that can reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke.



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"South Africans are at high risk for cardiovascular disease and our unhealthy lifestyles are largely to blame," says Dr Vash Mungal-Singh, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA. "Up to 70% of our women are overweight or obese, one in two women and over a quarter of men are physically inactive and 23% of our children 2-14 years are overweight or obese. Although the picture looks bleak, South Africans can reduce their risk by creating heart-healthy environments that encourage a healthy lifestyle."

The HSF recognises that not all individuals have the best opportunities to make heart-healthy choices. For instance, some people often lack access to healthy foods or to safe spaces to be physically active. However, all is not lost, even small changes can give big results and you can start in your home.

Heart-healthy homes

Put the spotlight on your home and see what you could change to make it heart-healthy. Making just a few changes can help reduce your own and your family's risk of heart disease and stroke.

- Stock your home with healthy food options
- Limit pre-packed or processed foods that are often high in sugar, fat and salt
- Incorporate fresh fruit and vegetables in your meals
- Use less salt at home
- Prepare healthy school or work lunches at home
- Be physically active - aim for 30 minutes five times a week
- Limit TV watching
- Ban smoking in your home
- Recognise your cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk

"This Heart Awareness Month we made it easier for South Africans to know their CVD risk by offering free blood pressure tests throughout September," says Dr Mungal-Singh. "One in three South African adults, 15 years or older has hypertension and the majority of them are unaware that they have the condition. High blood pressure is the leading cause of heart disease and strokes, and I urge all South Africans to take this opportunity to get their blood pressure tested."

Once you know your CVD risk, you can make a plan to improve your heart health and your healthcare professional can advise on appropriate treatment options where necessary.

Heart-healthy communities

Ensure that your communities become places where people thrive and have opportunities to make heart-healthy choices.

- Start a walking club in your community, it is safer to walk in a group and can be just the motivation you need to get up and out the door
- Make a complaint when you see smoking zones located near playgrounds, schools or close to entrances of public buildings
- Cycle or walk to school or work if you can
- Take the stairs or go for a walk in your lunch break
- Ask for healthy food at your work canteen and children's school

Heart-healthy nations

The HSF urges national policymakers to provide more opportunities for people to make heart-healthy choices.

- Provide safe environments like cycling paths and urban parks where people can be active - safely
- Regulate the amount and reach of fast-food advertising on TV and radio
- Enact legislation to tax unhealthy foods and support locally produced fruit and vegetables
- Ensure timely detection of CVD and cost-effective treatment to modify risk factors in high-risk individuals

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