

A guide to healthy eating

This information pamphlet is one of a series giving advice to healthy South Africans over the age of 7 years about healthy food choices for healthy living. Following the advice in these pamphlets will help us to make wise food choices for ourselves and our families' health.

Many South Africans are not as healthy as they could be. Some South Africans, especially children, are underweight, do not grow properly and get sick easily. This is because they eat too little food and/or do not eat enough variety of foods to give them all the nutrients their bodies need. Others are overweight, which can lead to serious illnesses such as diabetes mellitus, heart disease, hypertension and stroke. This is because these people eat too much food, especially those too high in fat, salt and/or sugar; and also because they do not do enough physical activity.



What should I eat to be healthy?

South African nutrition experts have developed guidelines to provide us and our families with advice on how to eat healthily.

When choosing foods and planning meals for ourselves and our families it is important to apply these guidelines.

Enjoy a variety of foods

It is important to eat different types of food, because one type of food does not contain all the nutrients we need. To eat wisely means to eat different types of food that contain all the nutrients our bodies need.

The best way to ensure that we obtain all of the nutrients we need is to eat three meals a day and to eat a variety of foods at these meals. Young children should have extra food between meals because their stomachs are smaller.

When planning good mixed meals, these are the guidelines we should use:

Make starchy foods the basis of most meals

Choose a starchy food such as maize meal, bread, rice, potatoes or any other starchy foods that are available and affordable. Starchy foods are rich sources of carbohydrates which supply the body with energy. Starchy foods should make up the main part of the meal, and other food should be served with them to provide extra nutrients. We should also ensure that we make fortified maize meal and/or fortified bread part of our family's daily meals.

Add other foods to the starchy food. Examples of these are found in the following three guidelines.



Chicken, fish, meat, milk or eggs could be eaten daily

These foods are good sources of many nutrients. These include protein and minerals to build our muscles, our bones, our teeth and our blood. We can eat small portions of these foods daily.



Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit every day

Vegetables and fruit supply lots of vitamins and minerals and other substances that are good for our health. We should eat at least 5 portions of vegetables and/or fruits a day. Add vegetables to the starchy food.



Eat dry beans, peas, lentils and soya regularly

These foods are rich sources of protein - needed to build, repair and maintain our body's muscles and tissues. Eat these foods at least three times a week with starchy foods.



Other Guidelines

Use salt sparingly

Add very little or no salt to foods at the table and during cooking. A high intake of salt has been linked with high blood pressure. High blood pressure damages the blood vessels and increases our risk for heart disease and stroke.

Use fats sparingly

An eating pattern, which is high in fat, has been linked with overweight, high cholesterol levels, heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. Therefore, we should eat fats sparingly.

Drink lots of clean, safe water

Water helps with the digestion and absorption of food and with the removal of waste products. Drinking too little water can lead to concentrated urine, reduced sweating, constipation, and oedema or water retention. Water from taps is usually safe, but rather boil and cool water from a well, river or borehole before drinking it.



If you drink alcohol, drink it sensibly

Alcohol is not an essential food for good health. A sensible limit is no more than two standard drinks per day for a woman and no more than three standard drinks a day for men. One standard drink is one can of beer (small) or one glass of wine (half a cup). Children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people who plan to drive or operate heavy machinery should not drink alcohol.

Use food and drinks containing sugar sparingly and not between meals

Food and drinks containing sugar should not be taken instead of mixed meals, but can be enjoyed in small amounts on special occasions or as a treat after a mixed meal.

Be active

Being active and eating healthily are the best ways to prevent us from gaining weight, or developing osteoporosis, high cholesterol, high blood pressure or diabetes.

Examples of good mixed meals:

Breakfast

Soft Porridge with
Milk/Sour milk/Maas
Tea with milk
Banana

Lunch

Brown bread sandwiches with pilchards
Margarine, thinly spread
Tea or coffee with milk
Orange

Supper

Samp and beans
Stewed tomato-and-onion
Spinach
Pumpkin

Brown Bread
Margarine, thinly spread
Jam
Tea with milk
Apple

Brown bread sandwiches with
baked beans
Margarine, thinly spread
Banana
Tea or coffee with milk

Stiff maize-meal porridge
Chicken stew with carrots
Green beans
Cooked cabbage

Remember to drink between 6 and 8 glasses of clean, safe water per day

For more information, contact:

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