MEDIA RELEASE

HOW TO MAKE HEALTHY EATING CHOICES EASIER

October 2022

According to Statistics SA, the consumer price inflation was 7.6% in August, down from 7.8% in July 2022.Food and non-alcoholic beverages (NOB) are among the main contributors to the annual inflation rate of 7.6%. The prices of food and NOB have increased by 11,3% year-on-year and contributed 1,9 percentage points to the total consumer price index (CPI) annual rate of 7,6%. The soaring costs of the monthly food basket is forcing most South African households to make some changes. Given the country's high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension and Type 2 diabetes, which are impacted by an unhealthy diet, it is vital that the current high cost of food doesn't become a barrier to healthy eating.

During October the Department of Health will be collaborating with other government departments as well as international and South African health organisations to address barriers to healthy eating and promote the National Nutrition Week 2022 theme '**Make healthy eating choices easier'**. The National Department of Health points out that in addition to concerns about NCDs, South Africa has the highest rates of overweight and obesity in Sub-Saharan Africa. When it comes to nutrition, South Africa bears a double burden where both under- and over-nutrition occur in our communities, sometimes even existing side by side in the same household. The Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2016 reported that 68% of South African women and 31% of men are overweight or obese. Around 20% of women and 3% of men are severely obese. In addition, approximately 13.3% of South African children under five years are overweight or obese, which is more than double the global average of 6.1%. Lifestyle changes, including making daily healthy eating choices and regular physical activity, are important for South Africans of all ages.

Research has shown that barriers to healthy eating include cost of healthy food, low levels of nutritional knowledge, culinary traditions, social pressures, and lack of time for meal planning and preparation. Many of the barriers to healthy eating have to do with perceptions rather than facts. An example of this is believing that healthy eating is more expensive when there are many affordable ways to make healthier eating choices.

Maria van der Merwe, the President of ADSA (Association for Dietetics in South Africa) says, "Currently, the high costs of living in South Africa are stimulating changes in what food we buy, and how often we eat out or choose ready-made foods such as takeaways over preparing meals at home. We can use this opportunity to make sure we are prioritising healthy eating. There are many ways that consumers can save on food costs. Focusing on meal planning and preparing meals from whole foods at home is cost-effective and linked to making healthy food choices."

Nicola Eley, acting Executive Director of Grow Great, a campaign that seeks to galvanise South Africa towards a national commitment to achieving zero stunting by 2030, states that mothers and children need access to affordable foods that contain growth promoting nutrients such as eggs, and that changing the culture of early childhood feeding practices begins at a household level. She says, "Providing support for moms who are still breastfeeding at work and at home ensures positive growth and development of a baby, coupled with healthy food choices, breastfeeding benefits both mom and baby, and protects children against obesity and stunting later in life."

Professor Pamela Naidoo, CEO of The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA), another partner in National Nutrition Week 2022, explains how healthy nutrition and physical activity can be used to reduce the risks of developing NCDs. She says, "225 South Africans die from cardiovascular disease every day. After TB and diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, which includes both heart disease and strokes, is the leading cause of death in South Africa. To put this in perspective, more South Africans die from heart disease and strokes than all cancers combined. The major causes of cardiovascular disease are overweight and obesity, as well as high blood pressure. In general, South African diets tend towards a low consumption of fresh vegetables and fruit, but a high intake of salt, fat and refined carbohydrates. Smoking tobacco and the use of alcohol are also contributing factors, as is a lack of physical activity. Therefore, it is important that we make changes to our lifestyle habits by making healthy eating choices and being active every day". Prof Naidoo further states that parents and caregivers need to make a conscious effort to influence their children's eating habits from a young age. Households looking to cut their budgets due to rising costs should first consider reducing or stopping their consumption of alcoholic drinks and tobacco, replace sugary cold drinks with fresh, clean water and swop fresh vegetables and fruits for salty snacks or sugary treats.

Many people think that healthy eating is expensive, but it doesn't have to be. Preparing meals at home is more affordable than buying ready-made foods or eating out, and it also increases the likelihood of making healthy eating choices. Carol Browne of the Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA) highlights these ***tips for planning and preparing quick, healthy and affordable home meals***:

- Draw up a monthly food budget and weekly or monthly menu plan that fits your budget and do your best to stick to it. Choose simple recipes to save time.
- Planning your menus and food preparation helps to reduce food waste, which is essential when you are on a tight budget. Don't let leftovers go to waste, and store foods properly to make them last longer.
- When you go food shopping, always use a shopping list that is based on your budget and your menu plan. Don't shop for food when you are hungry.
- Look out for specials, and if possible, buy in bulk and share bulk purchases with relatives or friends.
- Choose a variety of foods that are affordable and in season.
- Consider including a meat-free day at least once a week.
- Include dry beans, peas, lentils and soya which you can use in many dishes such as salads, soups, stews and curries. As they are high in plant protein, they can be used as a meat replacement in a dish, as a meat extender, or as an ingredient in their own right.
- Include plenty of different vegetables and fruit in your daily meal plan.

- Whenever possible, cook extra food for another supper or lunch the next day. Freeze extra portions that can be quickly reheated for another meal. This saves on energy costs as well as your time and prevents food waste.
- Use the right size pots and pans on the stove-top to save energy. Keeping the lid on pots of stews and soups allows for quicker cooking times and less energy use.
- Practice portion control to avoid over-eating.
- Use methods of cooking such as steaming, boiling, grilling and baking rather than deep fat frying to reduce your use of cooking oils and fats.
- Use herbs and spices to flavour your food instead of salt.
- At all ages, children need easy access, in their homes and at school, to a variety of suitable foods, including plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits, which can be grown at home, at school or in the community. Involve your children in meal preparation and enjoy sharing meals together without distractions such as screens.

NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2022 COLLABORATORS INCLUDE:

National and provincial Departments of Health
Department of Basic Education
Department of Social Development
South African Military Health Services (SAMHS)
Grow Great Campaign
United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)
The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA)
The Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA)
The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (HSFSA)
Healthy Living Alliance (HEALA)
School of Public Health, University of Witwatersrand

For additional information visit National Nutrition Week: www.nutritionweek.co.za

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