

## HEALTHY HABITS FOR A HEALTHY HEART

In South Africa, chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure are now responsible for more deaths than HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis combined.

These are sobering statistics, but even more so when you consider that following a healthy lifestyle may prevent over 80% of cases of heart disease alone. When you choose healthy behaviours, you proactively lower your heart disease risk while simultaneously also preventing other serious chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer.

Being physically active and focusing on quality nutrition are two key lifestyle habits that can dramatically reduce your chances of developing heart disease.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEART HEALTH



Physical activity offers protection against both the start and progression of heart disease. Studies have found that people who do no exercise are more than twice as likely to have heart disease compared to those who are regularly active. Just how does being active help your heart?

Exercise can be as effective as some medications in lowering your blood pressure and your heart rate. Since your heart is a muscle, it responds to exercise as any other muscle would – by getting stronger and more efficient. A stronger heart can pump more blood with less effort. As a result, the force on your arteries decreases, lowering your blood pressure. In addition, regular exercise improves the muscles' ability to draw oxygen from circulating blood, and keeps blood vessels strong and flexible. Together, this reduces the need for the heart to work harder to pump more blood to your working muscles.

Regular exercise is also a powerful way to lower whole-body inflammation. Over time, chronic inflammation can trigger your immune system to attack healthy tissue and organs in your body. When left untreated, prolonged chronic inflammation can increase your risk for diseases like diabetes, heart disease, cancer and rheumatoid arthritis.

When combined with the right diet, being physically active is an essential component for losing weight and even more important for keeping it off. Being overweight is an independent risk factor not only for heart disease, but also for diabetes, certain cancers and stroke.

## QUALITY NUTRITION AND HEART HEALTH



**It's been estimated that unhealthy eating habits now cause more disease than physical inactivity, alcohol and smoking combined. Let that sink in for a minute. Could your diet be worse for your health than smoking?**

The most important component of a healthy diet is to eat more "real food". Real food means unprocessed foods – anything that is as close to its natural form as possible. Fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, eggs, fish, beef or chicken are all good examples. While fresh produce fuels your body with nutrient-dense goodness, processed foods (things like convenience meals, fast food, sweets, chips) do the opposite. Processed foods remove things that are good for you (fibre and vitamins, for example) and add in unhealthy ingredients such as salt, unhealthy fats and sugar. These additions increase inflammation, upset your hormones and contribute to weight gain.

### References

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