

Love your heart



September is Heart Awareness Month and this year the focus is on blood pressure. A recently published study showed that one in three South Africans has high blood pressure; one of the highest rates in the world. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa is therefore encouraging South Africans to 'Beat the pressure. Get tested.'

High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of heart attack and stroke, and many people don't know they have it. Around 80% of heart disease deaths can be prevented by improving lifestyle risk factors like smoking, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diet.

Know your numbers: The most important step towards heart health is to know what your blood pressure is. High blood pressure often doesn't have any symptoms until it's too late to act. Visit your doctor or a clinic to get your blood pressure tested. For a healthy heart, your numbers should be close to 120/80; higher numbers indicate elevated blood pressure and increased heart disease risk.

The best reason to quit: Smoking has been shown to triple the risk of heart disease partly because it narrows the arteries and increases blood pressure. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the best ways to quit smoking. It might be tough, but your risk of heart disease falls within hours of quitting.

Feed your heart with love: Salt is one of the major offenders for increasing blood pressure

and it can be hard to avoid. Reducing your intake of processed foods including cheeses, deli meats, pre-prepared meals, and fast foods, as well as not adding salt to your food at the table can benefit your heart health dramatically. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa recommend eating no more than one teaspoon of salt a day. Cut down on your salt intake gradually, allowing your taste to adapt.

Get your heart on track: Getting physically active can have as much benefit for your blood pressure as medication. It also helps reduce stress, improve sleep, lower overall heart disease risk, cut the risk of some cancers, and improve circulation. Healthy adults should be getting a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise 5 days a week, or 25 minutes of vigorous exercise 3 days a week. Muscle strength exercises like resistance training or body-weight exercise are also essential twice a week.

Making small adjustments to your lifestyle can have significant heart health benefits. Take small steps towards reducing your blood pressure and love your heart.