



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## WHY BREAKFAST REALLY IS THE BEST WAY TO START YOUR DAY

October 2018

The importance of breakfast has long been a part of the prevailing wisdom, and the habit of eating breakfast has always been a marker of a healthy lifestyle. Yet, if there's a meal that is going to be skipped, it's probably breakfast; and this is a pity because research clearly shows that there are many vital health benefits associated with eating breakfast regularly. Studies show that 1 in 5 South African children skip breakfast.

For the first time, a broad coalition of health partners including leading non-profit organisations, health professional associations as well the National and Provincial Departments of Health, have aligned National Nutrition Week (9 – 15 October 2018) with National Obesity Week (15 – 19 October 2018) to promote a shared and very important message that eating breakfast is the best way to start your day.

After our longest fast, a healthy breakfast kick-starts the metabolism, lights up mental functioning and boosts physical energy on a day-to-day basis. However, the health benefits of breakfast are not just experienced over the short-term. Studies show that eating a healthy breakfast regularly over the long term helps to reduce risks of heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes. This correlates with studies that show that children, adolescents and adults who eat healthy breakfasts regularly have better, sustainable weight outcomes and are at a lower risk of becoming overweight and obesity.

“It is ironic that one of the common reasons for skipping breakfast is the desire to lose weight when it has the opposite effects,” says Rebone Ntsie, Director: Nutrition at the National Department of Health. “The lack of breakfast leads to a far greater risk of compensating with unhealthy snacks to get through to lunchtime and with bigger lunch portions.” Ntsie points out that, according to the 2016 South Africa Demographic and Health Survey, 68% of women and 31% of men in South Africa are overweight or obese. Life-threatening, severe obesity affects around 20% of women and 3% of men. Approximately 13.3% of children under 5 years of age are overweight or obese; and according to the 2012 South African Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES), 14.2% children aged 6 to 14 years are overweight or obese.

CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa, Professor Pamela Naidoo says: “At least 80% of early deaths caused by heart disease and stroke can be avoided by following a healthy diet, which includes eating a healthy breakfast, in combination with regular physical activity and avoiding

the use of tobacco. It is important to understand how the food choices we make contribute to overweight and obesity.”

Many South Africans consume large amounts of sugary drinks and eat a lot of convenience foods that are typically high in sugar and fats. There’s also a common preference for highly refined starchy foods over those that are minimally processed and healthier. Taking in too much food energy from nutrient-poor foods leads to weight gain.

However, making poor food choices is not the only issue. Professor Naidoo points out that our modern lifestyles easily lead to ‘portion distortion’. “Large portion size is also a major contributor to weight gain whether people eat out or at home,” she says. “With a gradual increase in the amount of food being purchased and served ready cooked, many people can no longer recognise the size of a healthy portion.”

Lack of knowledge and poor food choices lead to unhealthy diets, which are a risk factor for non-communicable diseases. Dr Christine Taljaard-Krugell, ADSA (Association for Dietetics in South Africa) President, points out the importance of engaging with a registered dietitian to help make healthy breakfasts a habit for the whole family. “Other reasons so many South Africans skip breakfast include food not being available, it not being a family routine, time pressure in the mornings, not feeling hungry or not liking typical breakfast foods. From food budgeting to menu planning and meal preparation, there are solutions to all these issues. Information and help are available.”

### **What should a healthy breakfast consist of?**

Breakfast should consist of at least one food group (excluding beverages). However, to stay fuller for longer and improve the variety of nutrients you take in at breakfast, it helps to include foods from three or more food groups. A rule of thumb is to choose a minimally processed starchy food combined with a food from at least one of the following groups:

- vegetables or fruit
- dry beans, lentils, split peas, soya
- fish, chicken, lean meat or eggs
- milk, maas or yoghurt
- plant oils, soft margarine, peanut butter

In addition, it is important to drink clean safe water instead of a sugary drink.

***The ‘breakfast is the best way to start the day’ campaign offers some key messages to inspire making a healthy breakfast a long-lasting habit and family routine:***

**Be ‘breakfast ready’ and beat the morning rush** – Breakfast doesn’t have to be a big production - with some planning and preparation, it can be quick and easy. Before you go to bed at night, set up your kitchen for breakfast. Soak the oats and slice the fruit so you don’t have to do it in the morning. Cook extra maize meal porridge for the next day’s breakfast when making supper, or boil some eggs the night before.

**Make it healthy and enjoyable** – “It’s easier to make breakfast a daily habit if you enjoy it,” says Carol Browne of the Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA). “While our cultures may define what breakfast foods are, there are really no hard and fast rules. It doesn’t matter whether you eat the same things as others for breakfast – it just matters that you have a healthy start to the day. This means having a minimally processed starchy food, as part of the meal, and combining it with food

from at least one other food group.” For example, maize meal porridge with maas and an apple; brown bread with pilchards and sliced tomato; Last night’s leftover beans can be used as a sandwich filling on brown bread for a great breakfast. “There are a lot of expensive foods presented to us as ideal for breakfast that are not always healthy,” adds Browne. “There are breakfast cereals, cereal bars and biscuits, jams and spreads stacked with added (free) sugars that we should not eat on a regular basis.”

**You don’t have to do a mega breakfast all in one go** – There are many people who question the advice to eat when they don’t feel hunger after they have woken up. However, breakfast can take place within 3 hours after waking. You can stagger your healthy breakfast by starting with an unsweetened, low-fat yoghurt before you leave home; having a banana en-route to work and eating a brown bread peanut butter sandwich just before you start work.

**Get your children involved in breakfast** – Parents and caregivers are role models for the healthy lifestyles we hope our children will adopt for their lifetimes. Studies have shown that children who eat breakfast perform better at school than those who skip it. Eating breakfast has an immediate, positive impact on cognitive function, especially memory and concentration. Parents are the major influence on whether children make eating breakfast a habit. It helps to make breakfast a family activity and involve children in preparing breakfast and eating together. Parents also need to ensure that healthy breakfast options that their children like to eat are available in the house.

**Don’t let breakfast break the budget** – Drawing up a monthly food budget and sticking to it can make a healthy breakfast, and all other family meals possible. Shop smarter wherever you can. Buy in bulk wherever possible, sharing, especially bulk fruit and vegetables, with extended family, friends and neighbours so that you can all benefit from healthier food choices. Monitor and reduce any household food waste. Think about how you can include more affordable healthy ingredients such as dry beans and lentils in your family meals, including tasty homemade beans on toast for breakfast.

**National Nutrition Week and National Obesity Week Partners are:**

- National and Provincial Departments of Health [www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za)
- Department of Basic Education (DBE)
- SA Military Health Services (SAMHS)
- The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) [www.adsa.org.za](http://www.adsa.org.za)
- The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) [www.cansa.org.za](http://www.cansa.org.za)
- The Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA) [www.nutritionociety.co.za](http://www.nutritionociety.co.za)
- The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (HSFSA) [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za)
- Consumer Education Project (CEP) of Milk South Africa [www.rediscoverdairy.co.za](http://www.rediscoverdairy.co.za)
- Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGC-SA)

The partners agree that eating breakfast daily has many health benefits. Planning for breakfast, from drawing up meal plans and a food budget to shopping for affordable, healthy options and preparing the night before, can help to avoid breakfast becoming a hassle. When you make breakfast an important and enjoyable part of your family routine, you model healthy lifestyle choices and behaviour that not just benefits your children through their school and study years, but can become a healthy habit for their lifetimes.

For additional information on why ‘breakfast is the best way to start the day’ as well as further tips and recipes, visit [www.nutritionweek.co.za](http://www.nutritionweek.co.za)

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Issued on behalf of:  
Issued by:  
Contact:

National Nutrition & Obesity Week  
liquidlingo Communications  
Jackie Busch  
+27 82 376 4446  
[jackie@liquidlingo.co.za](mailto:jackie@liquidlingo.co.za)