



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National Nutrition Week (NNW) 2021
"Eat more vegetables and fruit every day"

Questions and Answers

Contents

1.	What is the theme for National Nutrition Week (NNW) 2021?	3
2.	What is the campaign objective of NNW 2021?	3
3.	What are the key communication focus areas and messages?.....	3
4.	Who are the target audiences?	3
5.	Why was this particular theme chosen?.....	3
6.	Why are vegetables and fruit necessary for good health?.....	3
7.	How many vegetables and fruit are South Africans consuming per day?	4
8.	What are the reasons why consumption of vegetables and fruit is so low among South Africans?.....	4
9.	Why are vegetables and fruit so expensive compared to healthier food choices?	4
10.	How much vegetables and fruit should South Africans consume per day?.....	4
11.	How can people increase consumption of vegetables and fruit to help with portion control of other foods in a meal?	5
12.	What tips do you have for healthy snacks using vegetables and fruit?	5
13.	What tips do you have to encourage children to eat more vegetables and fruit?	6
14.	What tips do you have for tuckshops, catering facilities or vendors to sell more vegetable and fruit snacks at schools or in the community?	7
15.	What are the benefits of starting a food garden at household level or in the community?	8
16.	How can one start a food garden in an urban area where space is a limitation?	8
17.	Are there any organisations one can contact to assist with starting and maintaining a food garden at household or community level?.....	8
18.	Where can one get more information about NNW 2021?	8

1. What is the theme for National Nutrition Week (NNW) 2021?

The theme for the National Nutrition Week 2021 is: *“Eat more vegetables and fruit every day”*.

2. What is the campaign objective of NNW 2021?

The campaign objective of NNW 2021 is to increase consumption of vegetables and fruit among South Africans, particularly those most at risk of undernutrition and non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

3. What are the key communication focus areas and messages?

There are five key focus areas and target messages. They are:

Benefits of including vegetables and fruit in the diet (in the context of NCDs)	To increase adults', children's and adolescents' knowledge of the health benefits (protective effect) of eating more vegetables and fruit.
Portion sizes	To increase adults', adolescents' and caregivers' of children under five years old knowledge of recommended portion sizes of vegetables and fruit.
Complementary feeding	To increase caregivers' of children under five years old knowledge of the benefits of vegetables and fruit in the infant diet.
Snacking	To shift school children's, adolescents' and adults' attitudes towards choosing fruit and vegetables as snacks.
Grow your own	To increase adults' confidence and knowledge on how to grow their own vegetables.

4. Who are the target audiences?

The target audiences are all South Africans, specifically food insecure households and vulnerable groups, including children and women, and those most at risk for malnutrition and NCDs.

The campaign follows a life cycle approach, and thus targets caregivers and parents of infants and children, school children, adolescents and adults.

The campaign messages also aim to target educators in schools, early childhood development (ECD) centres, community nutrition development centres and healthcare facilities as audiences that influences other target groups.

5. Why was this particular theme chosen?

The United Nations has declared 2021 as the “International Year of Fruits and Vegetables” under the theme: *“Fruit and vegetables – your dietary essentials”*. The year aims to raise awareness of the nutritional and health benefits of consuming more fruits and vegetables as part of a diversified, balanced and healthy diet and lifestyle as well as to direct policy attention to reducing loss and waste as they are highly perishable. *“Eating plenty of vegetables and fruit”* is also one of the guidelines of the South African Food-based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs), also called the Guidelines for Healthy Eating.

6. Why are vegetables and fruit necessary for good health?

Diets high in vegetables and fruit are widely recommended for their health-promoting properties, i.e.

- They can promote good health for children by strengthening a child's immune system and help protect against disease.

- They may reduce the severity of some infectious diseases. Though they will not protect a person against a virus such as COVID-19, recovery from infectious disease is better when consuming fruit and vegetables than with diets low in this food group.
- People who eat more fruit and vegetables tend to live longer.
- They can help with gut health, help protect against heart disease and help to reduce the risk for obesity, diabetes and certain cancers.
- They contain vitamins, minerals, fibre, probiotics and dietary bioactive compounds that are important for good health.

7. How many vegetables and fruit are South Africans consuming per day?

South Africans aged 15 years and older eat well below the recommended 400g, i.e. five portions of vegetables and fruit per day at 226g per day for females, and 235g per day for males. Studies among adolescents and children younger than 15 years also show that vegetable and fruit consumption is inadequate.

8. Why is the consumption of vegetables and fruit is so low among South Africans?

In South Africa, the nutrition transition, which saw an increase in the intake of ultra-processed foods in the diet, such as sugary drinks and a decrease in the intake of vegetables and other more fibrous nutrient-rich foods, has been linked to the rise of overweight and obesity, and the decrease in the intake of vegetables.

Limited vegetable and fruit consumption is not simply determined by limited nutrition knowledge or poor decision-making by households, but rather by a much wider set of social, economic and spatial factors. Some of these barriers to including adequate amounts of vegetables and fruit in the diet are availability, acceptability, preparation, peer pressure, food availability and affordability of food in school tuck shops, perceived time and effort and confusing recommendations.

The current global pandemic of Coronavirus (COVID-19), and measures taken to reduce its spread, have also disrupted food environments around the world, and the intake of unhealthy foods increased as fresh food supplies were more affected. COVID-19 also negatively impacted the economy and households' purchasing power, which led to an increase in eating cheaper and unhealthier foods. Food systems are thus not delivering the healthy diets needed for nourishment and strong immune systems. There is an underproduction of beneficial foods such as vegetables, fruit, seeds and nuts, and over-production of nutrient-poor foods.

9. Why are vegetables and fruit so expensive compared to unhealthier food choices?

- (i) Cost of producing a variety of nutritious foods because of issues such as pre- and post-harvest losses, seasonality, climate risk factors, technology and information
- (ii) Supply chain costs such as inadequate food storage, handling and preservation, poor road networks and limited transport capacity
- (iii) Costs related to the food environment and consumer demand and behaviour, such as population growth and urbanisation, access to markets, food preferences, cultural issues, consumer knowledge and behaviour
- (iv) Costs related to the political economy of food such as impact of food and agricultural policies on the cost of healthy foods and trade issues

10. How much vegetables and fruit should South Africans consume per day?

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) recommends a minimum of 400g or five portions for vegetables and fruit for health benefits. Most nutritional and global recommendations include consumption of at least two portions of fruits and three portions of vegetables per day for adults.

One serving of vegetables or fruit = approximately 1 cup raw or ½ cup cooked, or 80g fresh and 30g dried

Fresh, frozen, tinned vegetables or fruit	½ cup cooked; 1 cup diced and raw
Raw, leafy vegetables	1 cup raw
Whole fruit	One medium (fist size) or two small
Dried fruit	30g or 2-3 pieces
100% fruit juice	125 ml (limit to 1 per day, if using)

Infants should be breastfed exclusively during the first six months of life. From six months of age, breast milk should be complemented with a variety of adequate, safe and nutrient-dense foods. Salt and sugars should not be added to complementary foods. Include dark-green leafy vegetables and orange-coloured vegetables and fruit in your child's meals every day. Portion size will be age specific.

11. How can people increase consumption of vegetables and fruit to help with portion control of other foods in a meal?

There are four basic principles for increasing vegetables and fruit:

- always include vegetables in meals
- eat fresh fruit and raw vegetables as snacks
- eat fresh fruit and vegetables that are in season
- eat a variety of fruit and vegetables.

Here are some practical tips for achieving this:

- (i) Try to include a variety of vegetables and fruit in daily meal plans – not only on weekends. Indigenous vegetables and fruit should be included where possible. Include both cooked and raw vegetables and salads in meals.
- (ii) Eat an orange/yellow vegetable (carrots, pumpkin, butternut) or a dark green vegetable (broccoli, spinach,) at least once a day. Ideally, try to get at least one serving from each of the following categories: dark green leafy vegetables; yellow or orange fruits and vegetables; red fruits and vegetables; and citrus fruits on most days.
- (iii) Portion sizes of vegetables can be more generous if a variety of vegetables is not available.
- (iv) Canned vegetables, with no added salt or sugar, are good alternatives to ensure a sufficient intake of vegetables. Salt, sugar, and preservatives are sometimes added during the canning process. Draining and rinsing foods can lower their salt and sugar contents. To avoid extra sugar, choose fruits that are canned in water or juice instead of syrup. It is therefore important to read the label.
- (v) If a freezer is available: frozen fruits and vegetables can be a cost-effective option or buy fresh vegetables or fruit in bulk if it is available at a good price and freeze.
- (vi) Always wash vegetables and fruit well in clean water before preparing, cooking and eating.
- (vii) Enjoying a healthy eating plan also means preparing food in healthy ways, for instance using cooking methods such as boiling, steaming, grilling and baking instead of frying.
- (viii) Once vegetables are cut, they need to be boiled or steamed in a *little* water for a short period to retain most of the nutrients. Most vegetables can be cooked in a few minutes if they are steamed, microwaved or stir-fried (in a little vegetable oil).

12. What tips do you have for healthy snacks using vegetables and fruit?

Here are a few healthy snack ideas:

- i. a medium-size apple cut into pieces and dipped in a peanut butter and yoghurt dip (2 tablespoons of peanut butter and ¾ cup low-fat, unsweetened yoghurt)
- ii. a medium-size banana
- iii. 1 cup steamed or raw green beans
- iv. 1 cup blueberries
- v. 1 cup grapes

- vi. 1 cup carrots, broccoli, celery sticks, or bell peppers (or combinations of any of these) with 2 tablespoons hummus, low-fat yoghurt or low-fat cottage cheese.
- vii. 1 cup of diced pieces of fruit with low-fat, unsweetened yogurt
- viii. A fruit/vegetables kebab
- ix. Instead of a high fat, sugary or salty snack from a vending machine, bring some cut-up vegetables or fruit from home.
- x. Vegetables and fruit make great snacks for children too. Stock up on vegetables for snacks and limit unhealthy snacks in the home. In this way, children will be more likely to choose vegetables when they are hungry.
- xi. Keep a container of chopped vegetables, like cucumber, carrots or celery sticks or a bowl of cherry tomatoes in the fridge or several ready-to-eat washed whole fruits in a bowl on the counter. These are often also more affordable than soft drinks, chips and sweets.
- xii. Offer older children frozen baby peas, but note that these can be a choking hazard for younger children.

13. What tips do you have to encourage children to eat more vegetables and fruit?

- (i) Family mealtime is a good time for adults to show their children how they enjoy vegetables as a way to encourage children to eat vegetables too. Role-modelling from parents is important in a child's acceptance of certain foods.
- (ii) Experiment with different food combinations, tastes, textures and methods of encouraging smaller children to eat if they refuse many foods.
- (iii) When feeding a young child, foods that can cause choking should be avoided, for instance, nuts and seeds, whole grapes and large pieces of raw vegetables.
- (iv) Start by introducing small amounts of soft, mashed fruit or cooked vegetables. Examples are banana, pawpaw, sweet potato or pumpkin.
- (v) For children 9 to 11 months, give them a piece of fruit or vegetable they can hold themselves, like banana or cooked carrot. Even if they don't eat everything, it can be fun to explore the new taste at their own pace.
- (vi) For children older than one year, cutting fruit and vegetables into small pieces so that the child can feed themselves is a good strategy. Fruit pieces like naartjie segments, apple wedges, cubes of guava, mango and pawpaw, have great vitamins needed for a strong immune system.
- (vii) Get older preschool children into the habit of eating raw vegetable sticks or fruit when they are hungry between meals.
- (viii) Continue to introduce (and re-introduce) vegetables. It is normal for children to say they do not like some vegetables when they first taste them (it can take up to 15 times before he/she develops a taste for a new food). If the child doesn't like a particular vegetable, try offering small amounts of the vegetable with another healthy food that he/she likes. Keep encouraging him/her to try and taste vegetables.
- (ix) Use praise when a child tries vegetables so that they will be more likely to eat vegetables again. Try not to let praise become the focus of the meal. On the other hand, punishing a child for not eating vegetables can turn vegetables into a negative thing for him/her. If he/she refuses to eat their vegetables, try not to make a big deal about it – just try again another time. If the child is not eating anymore of a meal, it's best to take his/her meal away after about 20 minutes or when everyone else has finished eating. It is also not a good idea to use food as a bribe. For example, avoid saying things like, 'If you eat your broccoli, you can have some ice-cream for dessert'. This can make your child more interested in treats than healthy foods. It also suggests that eating the healthy food is a chore. It can also encourage overeating.
- (x) Changing presentation and preparation can go a long way. Oven-roasting vegetables can make them tasty and crunchy and can entice picky eaters without all the added fat from deep-frying.
- (xi) Appearance is important – try to make fruit and vegetables 'fun' to encourage children to try more and eventually eat more vegetables, especially with younger children. Try to choose vegetables of different shapes, colours, textures and tastes. Make a vegetable face for a snack plate – grated carrot for hair, cherry tomatoes for eyes, a bean/grape for a nose and red bell pepper strips or a piece of apple for a mouth.
- (ii) If you serve new vegetables with other food your child enjoys, the entire focus of the meal is not on new vegetables.

- (iii) Remember that taste matters. For example, try roasting vegetables with fresh herbs and lemon juice or use finely sliced broccoli or in a stir-fry. This will probably appeal more to a child than large steamed pieces of vegetables.
- (iv) Try to serve vegetables in different ways, for instance, warm, cold, frozen, roasted, steamed, sautéed, with a healthy dip (hummus, guacamole, with peanut butter) and in different shapes.
- (v) Add pureed or grated vegetables in pasta sauce or soups. This won't change the child's behaviour and thinking about vegetables though, so it's also important to regularly give him/her vegetables in their original form, too. This will help your child to become familiar with different types of vegetables and their different tastes and textures.
- (vi) Involve children in planning and cooking family meals with vegetables so that they are more likely to want to eat the vegetables they've helped to prepare. For instance, they can help choose vegetables for dinner when buying groceries, put chopped vegetables in the steamer or saucepan before it is cooked or wash and dry salad leaves. Older children can help with grating or chopping vegetables when it is safe for them to safely handle sharper kitchen tools.

14. What tips do you have for tuckshops, catering facilities or vendors to sell more vegetable and fruit snacks at schools or in the community?

- (i) Negotiate with a local vegetable and fruit supplier(s) to get a good price for the vegetables and fruit that are available, which will allow for a reasonable profit margin.
- (ii) The size of the school and the number of potential customers can determine how much vegetables and fruit should be bought for sale at the school. It is better to under-order at first, but to have an arrangement with the local vegetable and/or fruit supplier for extra deliveries in the initial stages. Fruits with a longer shelf life, such as apples, oranges, naartjies or pears, can be ordered in greater numbers than more perishable ones such as bananas and peaches as they can be stored for more than a week.
- (iii) End-of-week sales of vegetables and fruit at reduced prices can be very popular, with children, staff and parents.
- (iv) Serve cooked vegetables or salads with every meal or include vegetables in stews or soups.

Vegetable and fruit snacks that can be sold:

- (a) Fruit
 - Puréed fruit frozen in an ice-cube tray and served in a cup (a great way to use up over-ripe fruit)
 - Whole fruits are convenient snacks and can be easily transported and consumed.
 - Frozen banana on a stick is a healthy alternative to an ice-cream.
 - Prepare bags of small or chopped fruit, such as grapes, orange quarters and pineapple rings.
 - Try stewed or canned fruits (unsweetened and in natural juice/water) – served in a cup topped with low-fat, unsweetened custard or low-fat, unsweetened yoghurt.
 - Prepare a fruit salad – fresh or pre-cut and unsweetened
 - Soak dried fruit in hot water or juice to make plump and served plain or with low-fat, unsweetened custard or low-fat, unsweetened yoghurt.
 - Mix dried fruit, for example apples, apricots, sultanas, prunes and dates, with nuts and seeds.
 - Fruit kebabs using fresh or frozen fruit are good alternatives to ice lollies.
 - Serve chopped canned fruit (in natural juice), set in small jelly cups.
 - Make 100 per cent fruit ice crush slushes with puréed fruit (a great way to use up over ripe fruit). Remember to limit fruit juice to one serving (125 ml) per day. Fruit juice has concentrated sugars and it's best to get your fruit serves mostly from whole fruits.
- (b) Vegetable-based snacks:
 - Chunky vegetable pieces served in a cup with a low-fat, low-sodium (salt) dip.
 - Celery sticks filled with reduced-salt, reduced-sugar peanut butter, or low-fat cottage cheese.
 - Cooked mealie (on the cob).

15. What are the benefits of starting a food garden at household level or in the community?

- i. There are a lot of social and environmental benefits for families, schools and communities in growing their own food. Communal farming not only unites neighbourhoods and help combat food insecurity - it also encourages healthier eating.
- ii. A range of vegetables can be grown at home or in school or communal gardens from the old favourites like spinach, tomatoes, carrots, beetroot, potatoes, mealies, green beans, peas, cabbage, cauliflower, garlic, onions to different lettuce varieties, peppers, chillies, artichokes, asparagus, brinjals, zucchini, patty pans, different colour tomatoes, different colour carrots and micro- greens to supply the growing demand for different organic vegetables by upmarket shops and restaurants.
- iii. One does not need a big garden or lots of water to grow your own food. One can start small! For instance start with a keyhole garden, bag garden, a compost trench bed or even with a hydroponic food garden.

16. How can one start a food garden in an urban area where space is a limitation?

- i. If space for a garden such as a backyard, balcony or rooftop is a problem then one can start a container garden to grow vegetables such as spinach or chard, lettuce, cherry and bush tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, summer squash and also herbs. Large buckets, crates or planter boxes can be used as containers. Remember drainage holes are essential. Without proper drainage, soil can become waterlogged and plants may die. The holes need to be large enough to allow excess water to drain out.
- ii. A container garden can be moved in and out of the sun. If your plants seem to dry out in one window area, you can try different areas to adjust to what is best.

17. Are there any organisations one can contact to assist with starting and maintaining a food garden at household or community level?

Some of the non-profit organisations assisting communities with food gardens include:

- Food and Trees for Africa: <https://trees.org.za/>
- Abalimi Bezekhaya: <https://abalimibezekhaya.org.za/>
- Neighbourhood Farm: <https://neighbourhoodfarm.org/>
- Siyakhana: <https://www.siyakhana.org/>
- iGardi Project <https://www.call2care.org.za/the-igardi-project>
- Soil for Life: <https://soilforlife.co.za/> <https://soilforlife.co.za/>

Government websites with more information on starting food gardens:

- Department of Basic Education:
<https://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/NationalSchoolNutritionProgramme.aspx>
- Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

18. Where can one get more information about NNW 2021?

www.nutritionweek.co.za

The national Department of Health: www.health.gov.za

The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA): www.adsa.org.za

The Nutrition Society of South Africa: www.nutritionssociety.co.za

Grow Great Campaign: www.growgreat.co.za

The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA: www.heartfoundation.co.za

The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA): www.cansa.org.za