



Basic Education  
Health



**NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK AND NATIONAL OBESITY WEEK 2018:  
“BREAKFAST – THE BEST WAY TO START YOUR DAY”**

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**



THE HEART  
AND STROKE  
FOUNDATION  
SOUTH AFRICA



South African Military Health Service

## 1. What are National Nutrition and Obesity Weeks?

National Nutrition Week (NNW) started in the 1990s after the national Department of Health was approached by the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA). It was agreed that it was important for nutrition messages to be included in the Health Awareness Calendar of the department. World Food Day is recognised on 16 October, and Nutrition Week in the week preceding this, namely from 9 to 15 October. National Obesity Week is commemorated from 15 to 19 October every year. In view of the high obesity rates in our country, it was decided to use the same theme during both National Nutrition Week and National Obesity Week to create awareness about the importance of healthy eating and the prevention and control of overweight and obesity. Our key message therefore speaks to both of these important weeks on the health calendar.

## 2. Why is good nutrition so important?

Good nutrition, in other words eating healthily, is a key component of a healthy lifestyle. Healthy eating and physical activity can help one to achieve and maintain a healthy weight; and reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer. The risk starts in childhood and builds up throughout life. The concept of optimising nutrition in the first 1 000 days (the period from conception to the first two years of life) is important for the prevention of over- and under-nutrition. Therefore, good nutrition promotes overall health.

## 3. What does it mean to be overweight or obese?

A body weight that is higher than what is considered a healthy weight for a given height, indicates overweight or obesity. Body mass index, or BMI, is used as a screening tool for overweight or obesity in adults. The BMI is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters, i.e.  $BMI = \text{kg/m}^2$ . If you are an adult and your BMI is:

- less than 18.5, it falls in the underweight range
- 18.5 to <25, it falls within the normal range
- 25.0 to <30, it means you are overweight
- 30.0 or higher, it means you are obese

A child under five years, whose weight-for-length/height as indicated on the Road-to-Health Booklet is above 2 standard deviations is overweight. If the weight-for-length/height is above 3 standard deviation, the child is obese. A child between five and 19 years, whose BMI-for-age is above 1 standard deviation is overweight and if the weight-for-age is above 2 standard deviations, the child is obese.

## 4. To what extent is overweight and obesity a problem in South Africa?

Obesity is one of the major public health concerns facing South Africa, and its impact and cost extends to individuals, families, communities, the health service and society as a whole. The number of people within South Africa who are overweight or obese has been rising over the past few decades. The *2016 South African Demographic and Health Survey* found that 68 per cent of women and 31 per cent of men in the country are overweight or obese. About 20 per cent of women and three per cent of men are severely obese. Approximately 13.3 per cent of children younger than five years are overweight or obese, while 14.2 per cent of children between the ages of six and 14 years are overweight or obese according to the *2012 South African Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES)*.

## 5. How do the food choices we make contribute to overweight and obesity?

- Many people in South Africa drink large amounts of sugary drinks, eat foods that are high in fat and/or sugar and highly refined. They therefore take in too much food energy with less nutrients, and so gain weight. An example of this is fat cakes that are eaten for breakfast. They may be at risk of not getting enough vitamins and minerals from the foods they eat, due to the low consumption of minimally processed starchy foods, vegetables, fruit and legumes.

- Large portion size is a major contributor to weight gain whether people eat at home or away from home. With a gradual increase in the amount of food being purchased and served ready cooked, people have lost touch with what a healthy amount to eat is. This is called portion distortion.

## 6. What is the aim of this year's National Nutrition Week and National Obesity Week?

The aim of National Nutrition and Obesity Weeks 2018 is to:

- emphasise the health benefits of eating breakfast regularly, especially for children and adolescents
- encourage consumers to make healthy breakfast choices, given time and budget constraints
- provide information on how to plan and prepare a healthy breakfast

## 7. What is meant with the term 'breakfast'?

Breakfast is the first meal after the longest period of sleep and it is consumed within the first three hours of waking. It consists of a food from at least one food group, excluding a beverage such as coffee or tea only. Breakfast may be consumed at a location other than home, for instance at school, at work, at a restaurant or while travelling. Breakfast food does not have to be eaten all at once, but can be spread between the first three hours after waking.

## 8. Why is it so important to eat breakfast?

Eating a healthy breakfast regularly, i.e. on most days of the week:

- forms part of a healthy lifestyle – people who eat breakfast regularly tend to be more active and follow a healthier lifestyle
- can provide important nutrients, such as fibre, vitamins and minerals
- contributes to healthy eating throughout the day – people who eat breakfast regularly also eat more vegetables and fruit and make healthy food choices the rest of the day, they snack less on unhealthy foods high in fat or sugar
- helps to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- helps to prevent type 2 diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure
- improves learners' alertness, mood, academic scores and class behaviour

## 9. From what age can a baby start eating breakfast?

Babies should be given only breastmilk for the first six months of life. Breastmilk contains all the energy, vitamins and other nutrients and water in the correct amounts that the baby needs. From the age of six months, complementary foods should be introduced and breastfeeding continued until the child is at least two years old. Start with one to two teaspoons of soft foods (mashed or sieved), two times per day. Increase this to up to ¼ to ½ cup per meal by 12 months, given as five small meals by then. One of these meals therefore could be breakfast that is eaten together with the family.

## 10. What should a healthy breakfast consist of?

Breakfast should consist of at least one food group (excluding beverages). Try to include foods from two or more food groups in your breakfast to keep fuller for longer and to improve the variety of nutrients provided by the meal. Minimally processed, starchy foods that are whole grain/high in fibre, vegetables or fruit, should be combined with a food from at least one of the following groups:

- 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.

## 11. What ideas do you have for interesting and healthy breakfasts?

- If you are in a real hurry, grab something to have on-the-go or at work, for instance a fruit and unsweetened low-fat yoghurt.
- Peel and chop fruit such as apples, mangoes and pineapples in slices. Freeze in ziplock bags and use in smoothies.
- Blend uncooked oats with some unsweetened low-fat yoghurt. Add a few nuts.
- Make your own home-made muesli:
  - take some raw oats
  - add whichever nuts/seeds you prefer
  - roast in the oven with a very small amount of honey and oil
  - serve this with fresh/dried fruit and low-fat, unsweetened yoghurt
- Try to include foods from at least two or more food groups in your breakfast to keep you fuller for longer, for example:
  - leftover maize meal porridge, with vegetables or low-fat milk
  - oats/mabele porridge/whole grain cereal with low-fat or fat-free milk
  - brown or wholewheat bread with maas, pilchards, avocado, peanut butter, beans or cottage or other low-fat cheese
  - an egg (boiled/poached/scrambled) on toast (brown or whole-wheat bread)
  - sliced fruit with unflavoured low-fat yoghurt
- Try to avoid refined, sweetened breakfast cereals, too much sugar from jams or table sugar, salt added to meals or unhealthy fats like butter, hard margarine or fat from bacon. Rather add fresh or dried fruit to breakfasts like oats, which add a natural sweetness, or use spices like cinnamon to add another interesting flavour.

## 12. Which foods should not be given to babies and young children?

- Do not give them biscuits, chocolates, chips, ice cream or add sugar, honey, syrup and non-dairy creamers to their food. These food has less nutrients and can make children put on too much weight. Offer children healthy snacks like fruit, yogurt (not sweetened) and brown bread with peanut butter or margarine, etc.
- Do not add salt and spices to their food because it can cause high blood pressure.
- Do not give them sugary soft drinks, sport drinks and fruit juice. These drinks can make children put on too much weight (overweight) and cause tooth decay. Instead give them plenty of clean, safe water or pasteurised full cream milk to drink.
- Do not give children tea/coffee and thin porridge in a bottle. Children have small stomachs. These drinks and foods will fill up the child's small stomach. They contain fewer nutrients and your child will not get enough nutrients to meet his/her needs.
- Do not give any food or drink in a bottle because it causes tooth decay. Teach your child to drink from a cup, it is much better.
- Do not give them food that may cause choking e.g. nuts, popcorn.

## 13. Can leftover foods from the previous night be used for breakfast the next day?

Yes, most definitely. Left-over foods from the previous night make great options for the next day's breakfast, for instance:

- cooked maize meal porridge that has cooled down and is eaten cold or reheated has a lower glycaemic index than freshly cooked maize meal porridge. This means a food where the carbohydrates break down slowly into glucose during digestion, which is released gradually in the blood stream. Therefore, one remains feeling full for a longer period
- left-over cooked vegetables can be eaten with maize meal porridge or as a sandwich filling
- left-over meat or cooked beans can also be used as sandwich fillings

## 14. What are the reasons why people do not eat breakfast?

Studies show that people give the following main reasons for not eating breakfast:

- there is not enough food in the house
- they do not have enough time to make breakfast

- they are not hungry when they wake up
- other people in the house are not eating breakfast
- they are unable to make their own breakfast (usually in the case of children)

**15. Food is expensive. What can I do to save costs but still be able to prepare healthy meals for my family?**

- Create a budget for food. Have an amount in mind and do your best to stick to it. Look at past receipts as a starting point.
- Compile a menu plan, then make a shopping list (see the National Nutrition Week website [www.nutritionweek.co.za](http://www.nutritionweek.co.za) for more information:). Be realistic. If you only have 20 minutes to prepare a meal, do not choose a recipe that will take double the time or longer to prepare.
- Make a list of food you already have in your refrigerator, freezer and pantry.
- Keep a shopping list in the kitchen to write down items that you need to buy and only buy those items.
- Practice portion control and cook just enough food for everyone.
- Plan to use leftovers for a few breakfasts, lunches or dinners.
- Look for store sales or specials on store pamphlets, coupons or online advertisements.
- Foods sold on sale must be checked for expiry dates and quality.
- Be sure you have enough extra money and storage space to buy in bulk.
- Buy only foods that your family will use up before it gets spoiled.
- For better value, buy fruits and vegetables when they are in season.
- Dry products like maize meal, wheat flour, rice, pasta, couscous and frozen foods keep well for a longer period and therefore can be bought in bulk.
- Single portion items are often more expensive than buying in bulk.
- When buying dry products in bulk, make sure it will be used up before the expiry date.
- Buy fewer canned or prepared or ready-to-eat foods. They cost more and are often higher in sugar, salt and fat.
- Ready-to-eat bottled baby foods are costly. Use fresh foods and vegetables that can be mashed to the right consistency for smaller children. Meat and fish can be grinded to the right texture for smaller children.
- Non-breastfed children can use full cream milk from as early as 12 months. There is therefore no need to buy infant formula.
- Do not buy expensive food thinking it is healthy as some expensive foods can have a low nutritional value.

**16. What can I do if I am not used to eating breakfast every day?**

Get into the habit of having breakfast every day. Start with two mornings in a week and then increase it over time. Your eventual goal is to eat breakfast every day.

**17. What can I do if I am not hungry when I wake up?**

- Split up the food to be eaten. If you are not hungry first thing in the morning, grab a piece of fruit and unsweetened low-fat yoghurt as you walk out of the door and take a packed sandwich or a healthy smoothie or unflavoured unsweetened yoghurt to eat or drink later.
- Keep nutrient-dense foods, such as trail mix, nuts or dried fruit in the car, in backpacks, purses or briefcases to eat on the way to school or work.

**18. How can I save time in order to have breakfast in the morning?**

- Start the day ten minutes earlier to allow time for preparing and eating breakfast.
- Set out dishes, utensils and non-perishable ready-to-serve foods, such as whole-grain bread or ready-to-eat cereals, on the counter the night before.
- Move refrigerated items, such as low-fat milk, unflavoured low-fat yoghurt and fresh fruit to the front of the refrigerator shelf for easy access.
- Wash fresh fruit and cut it for fruit cups.

- Layer fruit, cereal and unflavoured low-fat or fat-free yoghurt in a sealable container for a grab-and-go breakfast.
- Prepare hard-boiled eggs the night before so they are ready for a grab-and-go breakfast or to make an egg sandwich with toasted whole-wheat bread.
- Cook extra maize meal porridge for the next day's breakfast when making supper.
- Oats do not need to be cooked on the stove. Save time by cooking them in a microwave or by soaking them overnight.

**19. How can I get my family members to start eating breakfast?**

- Set an example for your children. Children who see adults eat breakfast are more likely to eat breakfast and carry on healthy habits.
- Plan to start having meals, including breakfast, together as a family. Start gradually with a few meals per week and then increase it.
- Schedule a specific time for having breakfast together.
- Involve children of all ages in planning, shopping and preparing meals. Children are more likely to eat the meals they help prepare.
- Turn off distractions like the TV, computer, tablets and phones during mealtimes. Keep toys and books off the table.
- Feed babies directly and assist older babies and young children when feeding themselves. Feed slowly and patiently and encourage children to eat, without forcing them, minimise distractions during meals if the child loses interest easily.
- Remember that feeding times are periods of learning and love. Talk to children during feeding, with eye-to-eye contact.

**20. Where can one get more information about National Nutrition and Obesity Weeks?**

- [www.nutritionweek.co.za](http://www.nutritionweek.co.za)
- The national Department of Health: [www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za)  
Telephone numbers:
  - National: (012) 395 8770
  - Western Cape: (021) 583 5663/2275
  - Eastern Cape: (040) 608 1705
  - Northern Cape: (053) 830 0551
  - KwaZulu-Natal: (033) 395 2326
  - Free State: (051) 408 1281/1896
  - Gauteng: (011) 355 3551
  - North West: (018) 397 2364
  - Mpumalanga: (013) 766 3413
  - Limpopo: (015) 293 6198
- The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA): [www.adsa.org.za](http://www.adsa.org.za); [info@adsa.org.za](mailto:info@adsa.org.za)  
Telephone: (011) 061 5000
- The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA): [www.cansa.org.za](http://www.cansa.org.za);  
Telephone: 0800 226672
- The Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA): [www.nutritionssociety.co.za](http://www.nutritionssociety.co.za)  
Telephone: 082 667 4723.
- The Heart and Stroke Foundation: [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za);  
Telephone: (021) 422 1586