

A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

– THE DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR SOUTH AFRICANS –

The information explosion in the science of nutrition very often creates the impression that available information is contradictory. Consequently, it is no longer easy to distinguish between fact, misinformation and fiction. The Nutrition Information Centre of the University of Stellenbosch (NICUS) was established to act as a reliable and independent source of nutrition information.

Initiating a healthy lifestyle (including dietary habits) plays an important role to reduce the risk for the development of the so-called diseases of lifestyle such as heart diseases, diabetes, obesity and cancer, amongst others.

To attain a healthy lifestyle one needs to address eating habits, activity levels and lifestyle habits such as smoking. It is important that you maintain your ideal body weight. If you are overweight, it is advisable to follow a healthy slimming diet under the supervision of a dietitian. Regular exercise plays an essential role in a healthy lifestyle. If you haven't exercised in a while, consult your doctor regarding an appropriate exercise program. If you smoke, it is advisable to stop.

The South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines for adults is a set of dietary guidelines developed specifically for South Africans. The message is positive, understandable and food based as opposed to previous nutrition tools. It is important to remember that with all of these guidelines one should use healthy cooking methods e.g. boil, steam, bake/grill in the oven and "braai" over coals. Limit the addition of any form of fat (*e.g. margarine, oil, butter, lard, mayonnaise, cream and cheese*) during food preparation.

The South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines

- 1. Enjoy a variety of food.**
Variety means eating different foods within a meal, on different days and preparing food in different healthy ways. This ensures that our diet contains sufficient nutrients and that it is more enjoyable. The more colourful a plate of food, the better the variety.
- 2. Be active**
Regular exercise has many benefits including weight control, reducing the risk for heart disease and osteoporosis, relaxation and better sleeping patterns. Aim to do at least one 30-45 minutes physical activity session every day, or three short 10-minute sessions over the course of the day. Make use of every opportunity to move!
- 3. Drink lots of clean, safe water.**
Every person should drink at least six to eight glasses (or more according to thirst or when physically active) of clean, safe water every day. This also includes Rooibos and other herbal teas with no added sugar or milk and low energy or sugar free cold drinks.
- 4. Make starchy foods the basis of most meals**
Starchy foods include maize meal, cereals, samp, bread, rice, pasta, potatoes and sweet potato. These foods are rich sources of carbohydrates, our main source of energy, and should be consumed with every meal. It is important to choose unrefined starchy foods which are high in fibre since these increase satiety, supports healthy bowel functioning and lower the risk

of developing diseases such as obesity and heart disease. Unrefined starches include whole-wheat bread, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, high fibre cereals, oats and coarse maize meal.

5. **Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit every day**

Fruit and vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals, fibre and water and one should aim to eat 5 portions or more per day. Try to eat different vegetables and fruit e.g. at least one good source of Vitamin C (*e.g. tomato, the cabbage family, citrus fruit and guavas*) and one dark green or dark yellow vegetable.

6. **Eat dry beans, split peas, lentils and soy regularly**

Legumes (or plant proteins) should be eaten two to three times per week. They are affordable, high in protein and fibre and low in fat and can easily be included in soups and stews.

7. **Chicken, fish, meat, milk or eggs can be eaten daily**

Small portions of these foods can be eaten daily, but need not be eaten daily. Animal-based foods are higher in fat (saturated fat) and we tend to eat more thereof than we need to. Try to include more plant protein sources and fatty fish (*e.g. snoek, sardines, pilchards, macriel, and salm*) and less red meat.

8. **Eat fats sparingly**

Fat intake should be limited, especially saturated- and trans fats (*animal fats, full cream dairy products, chocolate, coconut, hard margarine, full cream products, baked goods for e.g. pies and cookies and palm oils e.g. coffee creamers and artificial cream*). Rather include more mono-unsaturated fats in limited amounts in your diet (*e.g. use canola oil or olive oil instead of sunflower oil, spread avocado or peanut butter instead of margarine on bread*) and *polyunsaturated fat than saturated fat*.

9. **Use salt sparingly**

Use small amounts of salt in food preparation and avoid the use of extra salt at the table. Rather use herbs, salt-free spices and flavorings instead of salt. Also avoid processed foods with a high salt content.

10. **Use food and drinks containing sugar sparingly and not between meals**

Sugar is rich in energy, but it contains no other nutrients and can cause obesity if eaten in excess or with fatty foods. Choose foods and drinks with little or no sugar and avoid consuming sweet food and drinks between meals as this can cause tooth decay.

11. **If you drink alcohol, drink sensibly**

Alcohol is high in energy and contains no other nutrients. One does not need to drink alcohol, but if so, use it in moderate amounts (1 drink for women and 2 drinks for men per day). A standard drink is classified as 1 can of beer, 1 tot of spirits, 125ml of wine and 60ml sherry.

GENERAL NICUS TIPS TO COMPLIMENT THE SOUTH AFRICAN FOOD-BASED DIETARY GUIDELINES:

FOOD ITEM	Eat more of	Eat less of
Dairy products	Skimmed milk and -powder (e.g. Elite, Protea and Farmer's Pride), low fat buttermilk, low fat yogurt and low fat or fat free cottage cheese. The following cheeses can be used in moderate amounts: Ricotta, Mozzarella, Feta, soft goat's cheese, low fat cheese and low fat cheese spread.	Full cream milk and -powder, Ideal milk and condensed milk. Milk mixtures and coffee creamers. Ice cream, sorbet and full cream cheese (e.g. cream cheese, Cheddar, Gouda, Edam, Tussers, Blue cheese, hard goat's cheese, Cheshire, Emmenthal and Parmesan).
Meat <i>Replace meat more frequently with fish, chicken and legumes (peas, beans, lentils and soy) .</i>	Lean meats (e.g. lean lamb-, beef-, and pork). Preferably beef- and veal. Remove all visible fat before cooking.	Meat fat, sausage, bacon, offal and organ meat (e.g. liver, kidney, heart, brain, marrow and tongue). Processed cold meats and sausage (polony, salami and viennas).
Poultry and game	Chicken, turkey and ostrich (without skin especially white meat)	The skin of poultry. Duck and goose.
Fish and sea food	Any type of fish especially moderate to fatty fish (e.g. tuna, mackerel, cob, anchovies, haddock, flounder, salmon, trout, and sardines). Crayfish, oysters, mussels, crab and "perlemoen".	Any fish cooked/fried in oil and or crumbed. Caviar and calamari.
Fats <i>Always use all types of fat in moderation!</i>	Canola margarine and -oil. Olive oil, olives, nuts and avocado. Reduced oil mayonnaise or salad cream. Poli-unsaturated margarine and sunflower oil.	Butter, cream, normal full cream mayonnaise, coffee creamers, hard margarine, heated sunflower oil, coconut, palm oil (the fat in creamers) and coco butter (the fat in chocolate).
Nuts	Allowed in moderate amounts (5 to 8 nuts instead of 5 ml fat/oil). Opt for unsalted options	Avoid nuts and peanuts if you are overweight.
Vegetables and fruit <i>(at least 4-5 portions/day)</i>	Any vegetable and fruit, especially dark green or dark yellow vegetables and those rich in Vitamin C.	Limit the intake of avocado pear if you are overweight - use it instead of margarine on bread (5g margarine = 30g avocado or 8 olives). Do not cook vegetables with fat and sugar or white sauce and cheese
Bread and cereal products	Give preference to whole wheat and unrefined cereal products, e.g. high fibre cereals) and use brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, lentils or samp instead of rice.	Limit the intake of refined carbohydrates (e.g. sugar, sweets, honey, jam, white bread, cake, tart, pies, desserts and rich dessert sauces).
Drinks	Coffee and tea with skim milk and no added sugar and lots of water. A maximum of 3-4 cups of coffee and 2 drinks of alcohol per day can be used.	Avoid or limit fruit juices, alcoholic drinks and normal cold drinks (cordeals and carbonated drinks) if overweight.

For further, personalized and more detailed information, please contact NICUS or a dietitian registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

References from the scientific literature used to compile this document are available on request.

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