

Lifestyle diseases cause more deaths amongst South Africans

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Except for HIV/AIDS, diseases of lifestyle, especially obesity and the obesity-related diseases are becoming leading causes of death amongst South Africans today, according to Prof Andre Dannhauser, head of the department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of the Free State (UFS).

These lifestyle diseases are usually associated with prosperity, and they include obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, abnormal blood lipids, post-menopausal osteoporosis, osteoporotic hip-fractures, cancer, as well as liver diseases. Diseases of lifestyle are increasing in populations who adopt the refined low fibre, high fat, Westernized diet together with sedentary lifestyles.

Prof Dannhauser was delivering her inaugural lecture as professor at the University of the Free State on the topic nutritional challenges in obtaining optimal health and wellness.

She said that food fortification is used to address nutrient deficiencies amongst South Africans and also emphasized the value of the South African dietary guidelines for the prevention of diseases of lifestyle.

She also said that dietary supplements had become a trillion dollar business as a result of many people taking refuge in dietary supplements to fill gaps in dietary choices. She warned that although supplements may add to daily intake of nutrients, supplements should, not replace natural foods which may contain unidentified substances that could be essential for optimal health and wellness.

She said that optimal health is determined by three key components: genetics, nutrition and lifestyle. "The fact that the DNA blueprint of an individual in combination with nutrition and lifestyle factors holds the key to unlocking health and well-being, brings a new dimension in preventative medicine", she said.

She stressed the value of plant-based diets. She said plant foods contain phytochemicals that may reduce the risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease. "Plant pigments" are one of the types of phytochemicals and are colorful, for an example red, yellow-green, red-purple, orange, orange-yellow, green and white-green. Consumers are advised to ingest one serving from each of these groups daily, thus five to nine servings per day', she said.

Prof. Dannhausser also talked about the health-promoting effects of whole grains, nuts, dry beans, soy beans, fatty fish and olive oil. She recommended carbohydrate-rich foods that have a slow influence on blood sugar, like dry

beans, vegetables, whole fruit and whole grain, such as oat meal and basmati rice.

She emphasized the positive health benefits of regular physical activity, such as weight control, appetite control, muscle strength, cardiovascular health and blood pressure. She said regular physical activity also reduces the risk of developing insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, enhances psychological well-being, enhances immune competence and promotes optimal bone density, reduces the risk of falls, prevents certain muscle injuries, reduces cancer risk and mortality rate and quality of life.

She recommended that adults should at least participate in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity daily.

Prof. Dannhausser concluded by saying that nutrigenomics will add fine tuning to individualized designer diets for the 21st century. She stressed the importance of eating a variety of healthy foods and to adopt healthy lifestyles. She further encourages people to take action and become smart people, practice smart nutrition and live smart lifestyles.

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