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## SA URGED TO KICKSTART SUMMER WITH A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE

*03 November 2015:* The latest statistics published in the Lancet medical journal indicate that South Africa has the highest obesity rate in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 61% of the South African population being overweight or obese. These shocking statistics indicate that more South Africans need to consider making effective lifestyle changes in order to maintain a healthier life.

This is according to Dr Dominique Stott, Executive: Medical Standards and Services at PPS, who says that the country's obesity statistics reveal that most South Africans are not heeding the warnings provided by the medical community. "Unless the majority of the population is willing to make lifestyle changes where necessary, there is going to be a substantial increase in morbidity and mortality rates due to poor health caused by lifestyle-related diseases."

The obesity levels of a country are usually a good indicator of the lifestyle habits of that nation, as one expects members of a healthy nation to be aware of their weight and the long-term implications of unhealthy routines. Dr Stott states that our developing population in South Africa is fast following the pattern of the Western world, as we are facing increased cases of non-communicable diseases related to obesity, such as hypertension and diabetes.

"Following cigarette smoking, obesity has recently become the greatest preventable health-related cause of mortality in the world. Essentially, overeating is the new smoking," states Dr Stott.

She explains that while there is no certain way to guarantee a longer life, by following basic guidelines of not smoking, consuming alcohol in moderation, doing some form of exercise at least three times a week and cutting down on fatty foods and sugar, people can improve their health.

Dr Stott advises that it is also possible for people with lifestyle related diseases, such as high cholesterol, to improve their condition through lifestyle changes. "Although these patients still require prescribed medication, diet and exercise can play a critical role in managing and preventing non-communicable diseases. However, it is best to consult one's doctor before making any changes."

It is a good idea for any individual to calculate their recommended daily kilojoule intake in order to determine how many kilojoules they can consume to make sure they are not overeating, says Dr Stott. "An easy way to calculate one's recommended daily kilojoule intake is to take one's desired weight in kilograms and multiply this number by 22 for sedentary people, by 26 for active and by 30 for very active people. As most store-bought foods indicate nutritional information and values on their labels, it is relatively easy to ensure that one does not consume too many kilojoules on a daily basis."

When it comes to exercise, Dr Stott says that any form of exercise for at least 30 minutes three times per week is advisable for most people. "It does not necessarily need to be formal exercise only. For example, climbing stairs or walking during lunchtime is better than doing no exercise at all."

Rather than trying to do everything at once, people should implement incremental changes into their daily routines to ensure success, advises Dr Stott. "For example, one can start off by taking a brisk walk twice a week, the walk will turn into a short run and over a period of time eventually they will be able to increase the distance and the times and frequency of the run. It is easier for most people to start small and work their way up."

By following this approach Dr Stott believes that people won't get as easily discouraged if they can't manage a full initial exercise programme. "In addition, by taking up an exercise that suits their lifestyle, people can keep it up over time and continue with their training programme and eating plan."

When it comes to insurance, there is a trend in the industry where people with healthy lives tend to live and work longer than unhealthy individuals. Insurance for healthy people is underwritten at standard rates, which mean that they are expected to live a normal life span, unlike unhealthy individuals, concludes Dr Stott.