7 steps to spring clean your heart

Spring brings with it not only a promise of warmer weather, but also a renewed focus on heart disease. Diseases of the heart and the blood vessels – called cardiovascular disease – is the leading cause of death worldwide, and second only to HIV/AIDS in South Africa. September is dedicated to awareness around heart disease, which includes awareness of the risk factors and motivating for better lifestyle choices to prevent it.

For 2015 the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa has titled their campaign “Have Heart, show you care…” This is a call to all people of South African to get involved. The campaign has a two-step goal, firstly to encourage people to get tested, and secondly to motivate us to make changes towards a heart healthy lifestyle. Here are 7 steps to get you going in the right direction:

1. **Know your numbers** - Spring is about starting fresh and cleaning out the old. Spring cleaning for your heart means asking where you are now, what is the current state of affairs. The biggest risk factors for heart disease include a high blood pressure, smoking, obesity and diabetes. Do you know your blood pressure? Is it 113 over 69, or maybe 137 over 84? If you don’t know, it’s time to find out! Dis-chem pharmacies have joined the 2015 campaign, and anybody can get their blood pressure and blood sugar tested for FREE during September. By knowing these important numbers you have taken your very first step to a healthier heart.

2. **Move more** - being active is not all about exercise, but rather improvising to get active in any way that suits your lifestyle and environment. Just remember - get the heart rate and the breathing rate up for it to have the most benefit to your health. The more the better but aim for 30 minutes of activity on most days.

3. **Breath fresh** - We all know smoking is bad news, particularly for people with diabetes. If you are still a smoker this may be the perfect time to reconsider. For the rest of us, we need to demand fresh air and ensure other people don’t smoke around us. Second hand smoking affects 1 in 5 South Africans!
4. **Ditch the salt shaker** - Salt and blood pressure are like an unhappy couple - they bring out the worst in one another! Start by breaking the habit of adding salt at the table. Once you have mastered this, move on to reducing salt whilst cooking. This could be as easy as using only ½ a stock cube instead of 1 and swapping the barbecue spice for Italian herbs and a squeeze of lemon.

5. **Portion power** - We often get tricked (sometimes by ourselves) into eating more than we need to. Plan your meal ahead whether at home or out. Dish away from the table and avoid seconds, or share a main and a dessert with someone else when eating out.

6. **Mission: Vegetable** - Few of us eat enough veggies. Sneaking them into your kids’ meals is the oldest trick in the book, but why not try it on yourself too? They add extra fibre for fullness and more nutrient richness. Add aubergines and spinach into a chicken curry or broccoli and courgettes to bulk up a summery salad.

7. **Sharing is caring** - South Africa needs all the help it can get. A shocking 75% of people with high blood pressure don’t even know they have it! Do your part and encourage others to also know their numbers. A boost in feel-good-hormones is an added bonus! Show you care for yourself, for your family, and South Africa. Take a selfie when you have your numbers checked for free at your nearest Dis-chem pharmacy during the whole of September and share it on our Facebook page or Twitter handle with #HaveHeart. You even stand a chance of winning some great spot prizes - now that’s rewarding!