

CareWorks' Employee Wellness Programme

Take Heart: A Guide to Heart Health for South African Employees

Heart disease remains one of the leading causes of death in South Africa, yet many of its risk factors are within our control. With long working hours, daily stress, and unhealthy habits creeping into our routines, it's more important than ever to prioritise heart health—both at home and in the workplace.

Why Heart Health Matters

The heart is the engine of your body, pumping blood and oxygen to every organ. A strong heart improves your energy levels, boosts productivity, and reduces the risk of chronic illness. In South Africa, conditions like hypertension (high blood pressure), high cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity significantly increase the risk of heart disease.

According to the **Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa**, up to 80% of heart disease and stroke can be prevented through simple lifestyle changes. That's good news—it means we can take action.

Top Risk Factors Among South African Workers

- **Poor diet:** High intake of salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats.
 - **Sedentary lifestyle:** Desk jobs mean less physical activity.
 - **Stress:** Financial pressure, work demands, and burnout are common.
 - **Smoking and alcohol abuse:** Both raise heart disease risk significantly.
 - **Undiagnosed or unmanaged high blood pressure or diabetes.**
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How to Protect Your Heart—At Work and At Home

1. Know Your Numbers

Regular screenings are essential. Track your:

- **Blood pressure**
- **Cholesterol levels**
- **Blood sugar**
- **Body Mass Index (BMI)**

Your employer may offer annual wellness checks. Take advantage of them—they could save your life.

2. Eat for a Healthy Heart

- Choose traditional whole foods like **maize meal (unsalted), lentils, beans, and vegetables**.
- Avoid processed meats, sugary snacks, and salty takeaways.
- Opt for **healthy fats**—like avocado, olive oil, and nuts.
- Limit salt intake: The South African average is **double** the recommended daily limit.

3. Stay Active

- Aim for **at least 30 minutes of moderate activity** most days of the week.
- Try walking meetings, use stairs, or stretch at your desk.
- Encourage a workplace wellness challenge—group walks or team fitness goals can help build healthy habits together.

4. Manage Stress

Chronic stress raises blood pressure and harms your heart. Healthy coping mechanisms include:

- Deep breathing or mindfulness practices
- Talking to a counsellor (check if your employer offers an Employee Assistance Programme)
- Taking regular breaks during your workday

5. Stop Smoking and Limit Alcohol

- Smoking **doubles your risk** of heart disease.
- Excessive alcohol can lead to high blood pressure and irregular heartbeats. Seek support through workplace wellness initiatives or your local clinic.

What Employers Can Do

A heart-healthy workforce is a more productive and engaged one. Employers can:

- Promote healthy canteen options and hydration stations
- Support physical activity with onsite or virtual wellness programmes
- Offer health screenings and chronic condition management
- Create a culture where taking care of your health is seen as a strength—not a weakness

In Closing

Your heart works for you 24/7. It's time to return the favour. Whether you're in the office, on site, or working from home, small daily changes can make a big difference. Remember: **a healthy heart is a strong start** to a healthier, happier life.

If you haven't had your heart health checked this year, book a screening today. It might be the most important meeting on your calendar.

For more information, visit [Heart and Stroke Foundation SA](#) or speak to your wellness programme coordinator.

Take control of your health—get tested, stay active, and eat smart. Your future self will thank you.
