



OBESITY CAN COST YOU MORE THAN YOUR HEALTH WARNS PPS

28 February 2012: In South Africa currently approximately 61% of the population is considered overweight or obese. As a result, more than half of the population not only risk developing chronic health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease, but are also potentially placing themselves under severe financial strain.

This is according to Dr Dominique Stott, Executive: Medical Standards and Services at PPS, who urges all South Africans to make a concerted effort to watch their weight in light of Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Month in February. “Being obese not only presents major health problems for those concerned, but also financial problems due to more frequent medical bills and possible penalties for life insurance or medical aid.”

“Obesity places a huge strain on organ systems, such as the heart and blood vessels, as well as the musculoskeletal system, so effects can range from high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease to back ache and arthritis of the spine, knees and ankles. High kilojoule intake may also contribute to cognitive problems such as memory deficits.”

She says that in the longer term, especially for those individuals with a family history, obese people are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. “According to statistics published in the US, there is also an increased probability of certain forms of cancer, with obesity having been linked to the disease. It is also more difficult to detect cancer in obese patients so e.g. mammograms for early breast cancer are more difficult to interpret.”

Dr Stott says obesity also presents a far higher rate of significant complications from simple surgery, due to operations taking longer or the surgeon having to contend with the mechanical problems which layers of fat may bring.

“Sometimes one may pay higher life insurance premiums for obesity due to the long term health risks. For the morbidly obese – those with a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 40 - they may even be declined life insurance or other benefits. Unfortunately, sometimes that wake-up call might come too late if arthritis or heart disease has already established itself.”

However it is never too late to lose the excess weight and in doing so some of the health problems may diminish, says Dr Stott. “If one has developed early type 2 diabetes then this may be reversed if the excess weight is lost.”

“Getting active is an excellent way to start reducing the BMI and a good opportunity to relook at ones whole lifestyle to make positive changes. Building in some form of physical movement into everyday activities, even in the workplace, will help to expend excess energy. For example, get up to talk to someone instead of sending mails or

telephoning, parking further distances away from the entrance to the shops or the office, or even taking the stairs instead of using the lift.”

Dr Stott says joining a weight loss group is an excellent option to lose excess weight. “The psychological benefits of weight loss are also really good for one’s mental strength as it builds confidence and people are naturally happier at a lower weight.”

“For those South Africans suffering from obesity the time to act is now before it causes irreversible damage to one’s health and finances,” concludes Dr Stott.

Side Bar:

How to calculate your Body Mass Index:

Classification of weight falls into categories according to the medical standard of Body Mass Index or BMI. This is calculated from the weight in kilograms divided by the height in cm ² and gives an indicator of the degree of overweight or obesity. A BMI of 25-30 is regarded as overweight and over 30 obese. A morbidly obese person would be one with a BMI over 40. As an example this would be a person 1.85m tall who weighs 140kg.