



# HEART AWARENESS MONTH: PROTECTING THE ENGINE OF YOUR LIFE

## OPENING HOOK

Every day, your heart beats around 100,000 times, tirelessly powering every cell in your body. But in South Africa, cardiovascular disease (CVD) is quietly claiming lives at an alarming rate, often without warning. Heart Awareness Month is a chance to take stock, learn the risks, and take action to protect the engine of your life.

## GLOBAL CONTEXT

Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death globally, accounting for an estimated 17.9 million deaths each year, that's 32% of all global deaths (World Health Organization, 2023). The majority of these deaths are due to heart attacks and strokes, and three-quarters occur in low- and middle-income countries. Lifestyle risk factors like poor diet, physical inactivity, tobacco use, and harmful alcohol use are major contributors.

“*Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death globally.*”

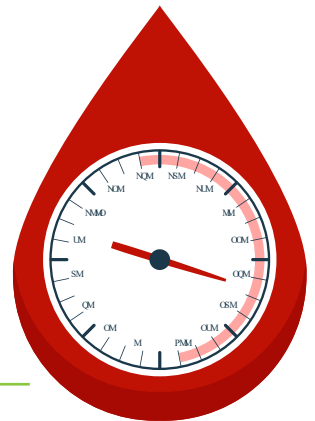


# SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In South Africa, cardiovascular disease is a growing public health crisis.

- **CVD accounts for approximately 1 in 6 deaths** (around 17–19%), equating to **215 deaths every single day** (World Heart Federation; Organ Sci Group, 2024).
- The proportion of deaths from circulatory diseases has **risen from 15.2% in 2010 to nearly 19% in 2018** (Nature, 2022).
- High blood pressure affects **one in three adults**, yet many are undiagnosed or poorly managed.
- Risk factors such as obesity, diabetes, and high cholesterol are on the rise, particularly in younger populations.

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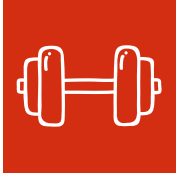
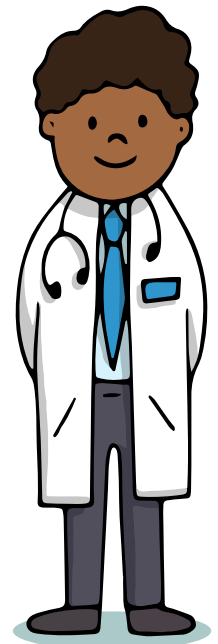


This means the burden is not only growing but shifting, more working-age adults are developing preventable heart disease, impacting families, workplaces, and the economy.

For employees, poor heart health can lead to fatigue, reduced productivity, and increased sick leave. For employers, the costs show up in lost productivity, absenteeism, and increased healthcare claims. Investing in heart health is not just about saving lives, it is about sustaining a healthy, engaged, and high-performing workforce.

# What you can do

Making lifestyle changes can drastically reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease, even if you already have some risk factors. Research published in *The Lancet* (2019) found that up to 80% of premature heart disease and strokes can be prevented through healthy habits.



- Regular physical activity strengthens the heart muscle, improves circulation, and helps regulate blood pressure.



- A balanced diet rich in vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, and whole grains lowers cholesterol and reduces inflammation, while cutting salt can significantly reduce hypertension risk.



- Quitting smoking has immediate and long-term benefits, within **one year**, the risk of coronary heart disease drops by **50%**.



- Maintaining a healthy weight helps regulate blood sugar and lowers the strain on the heart. Every small, consistent choice, from taking the stairs to replacing sugary drinks with water compounds over time, shaping a healthier future.

**The question is:** if your heart could thank you in 10 years, what would you want it to say?

- ❗ **Get checked:** Know your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar numbers.
- ❗ **Move daily:** Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week.
- ❗ **Eat smart:** Limit processed foods, reduce salt and sugar, and focus on fresh fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains.
- ❗ **Quit smoking** and **limit alcohol** intake.

# As an organisation

- Offer on-site health screenings or partner with wellness providers.
- Promote heart-healthy policies, such as active breaks or walking meetings.
- Provide access to nutrition and exercise programmes.
- Support employees with chronic conditions through workplace flexibility and resources.

## References

- World Health Organization. (2023). Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs). Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cardiovascular-diseases-\(cvds\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cardiovascular-diseases-(cvds))
- World Heart Federation. (2017). Cardiovascular diseases in South Africa.
- Organ Sci Group. (2024). Cardiovascular Disease Burden in South Africa.
- Nature. (2022). Changing patterns in causes of death in South Africa, 2010–2018.



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