



SA diet worries experts

Too much refined high energy food eaten in SA, study reveals

A STUDY funded by the Centre of Excellence in Food Security has revealed that most South Africans consume high-energy but nutrient-poor foods.

Professor Hettie Schönfeldt of the University of Pretoria, together with colleagues from the University of Cape Town and the Human Sciences Research Council, conducted a review of all dietary studies, in an attempt to portray typi-



A study revealed that most South Africans eat too much sugar, carbohydrates and refined foods. PHOTO: FILE

cal adult dietary intakes and to assess possible dietary deficiencies. Using online data and data from li-

braries, the researchers reviewed the diets of adults and children between 2000 and 2015.

What the study revealed is worrying: the study found that while the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended average energy intake for adults to lead a healthy and active lifestyle is 8 700 kilojoules (kJ), South African males were consuming between 6 100 kJ to 13 974 kJ, and females between 5 400 kJ and 11 978 kJ.

"This indicates that many South Africans are either underweight or overweight, both of which have serious health implications," said Professor Schönfeldt.

A closer look at the source of their energy intake revealed that people consume too much sugar and carbohydrates, and too little protein, added Schönfeldt.

According to WHO, essential nutrients for humans include protein, carbohydrates, fats and lipids, a range of vitamins, and a host of minerals and trace elements.

Many countries, including South Africa use the WHO's recommended dietary guidelines for populations across the world. However, the reality in South Africa is that most people cannot afford to eat according to WHO standards.

Although the fat intake was within WHO recommendations, the type of fat consumed was also a concern.

Similarly, the amounts of essential micronutrients like vitamins and minerals in people's diets varied greatly, and people from rural and urban populations consumed vastly different amounts of

food. Further, the study revealed that most South Africans eat refined foods. Refined food is food that has been processed to look and taste different than in its original state. "For example, many white breads have had the nutrient-rich bran and germ removed from the grain, leaving the bread with very little nutritional value," professor Schönfeldt explained.

The research also shows that adult diets are changing — even in rural, traditionally subsistence-based communities — to energy-rich but nutrient-poor foods, which are associated with obesity and type 2 diabetes.

— Issued by DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security.

