

Knowledge of healthy eating amongst rural secondary school learners in South Africa

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Introduction: People are what they eat and how they eat. Certain eating practices predispose people to diseases such as obesity, heart failure, diabetes and hypertension. Healthy eating is a preventative measure against such diseases. Knowledge of what and how to eat is needed of people wish to stay healthy. This study assessed knowledge of healthy eating among rural secondary school learners in South Africa.

Objectives: To assess secondary school learners' knowledge of the number of times a person should eat per day; to assess secondary school learners' knowledge of the four basic nutrients found in food; and to assess secondary school learners' knowledge of nutrients supplied by food items.

Methodology: This study adopted a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design. Data was collected from a total of 321 randomly selected learners aged 14-18 years from 10 secondary schools that makes up a rural Vhumbedzi circuit in the Limpopo province using a self-administered questionnaire. Permission to enter the circuit and schools was obtained from the circuit manager and parents/learners informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Results: The majority (61% of respondents) did not know the recommended number of times people should eat per day. The majority (76% of respondents) knew the four basic nutrients found in food. The majority (98% of respondents) knew that from apples, oranges and banana we get vitamins. The majority (91% of respondents) did not know that from porridge, cornflakes and bread we get carbohydrates. The majority (66% of respondents) did not know that from chicken necks, chicken hearts and beef livers we get proteins. The majority (95% of respondents) knew that from polony and vienna we get a lot of fats.

Conclusion and recommendation: Rural secondary school learners in South Africa lack adequate knowledge of healthy eating. Lack of knowledge of healthy eating might lead learners to adopt eating practices that predispose them to diseases such as obesity, heart failure, diabetes and hypertension. Education about healthy eating habits should be intensified in rural schools of South Africa.

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