

Exercise is Medicine

In a report released by the World Health Organisation entitled *Reducing risks, Promoting Healthy Lifestyles*, physical inactivity is listed as one of the major risk factors for global morbidity and mortality. Physical inactivity leads to conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity and an increased body mass index – a major health problem in South Africa. According to the South African Demographic Survey, 23% of men and 57% of women age 15 years and older are overweight. This is a huge problem for South Africans! Being overweight is not just about aesthetics and looks, the greater concern is that obesity makes one susceptible to various respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine and psychological disorders.

While the risk factors for the above-mentioned chronic lifestyle diseases are multifactorial, it is well recognised that many of these risks are rooted in the lifestyles we lead: sedentary, unhealthy diet, tobacco smoking, and physical inactivity to name but a few. These chronic lifestyle diseases have

placed a heavy burden on public health resources in South Africa. In an article published in *BuaNews* in November 2005, former Gauteng Province Health MEC, Gwen Ramokgopa, reports that between 2003 and 2004, the number of people seeking treatment for these diseases increased more than four-fold from 500 000 to 2.5 million.

The good news is that by modifying lifestyle, these chronic diseases are largely preventable and controllable. Moderate exercise plays a particularly valuable role in decreasing the risk of developing any of the above diseases. It is through recognition of this simple fact and acknowledgement of the increasing incidence and burden of these diseases that the University of Pretoria has joined the global fight against physical inactivity: *Exercise is Medicine*.

The *Exercise is Medicine (EIM)* campaign is a global initiative that aims to promote regular physical activity as a means to prevent and treat certain diseases. The initiative was founded in the United States in 2008 and has since gone



Sports Medicine joins the fight against physical inactivity

Text: Dr Phatso Cele, hpc Images: Dr Cele's own collection

global, being taken up by various international institutions and organizations. The University of Pretoria Section Sports Medicine recently joined the global campaign, kicking off with a spectacularly successful Fun Walk and Information day on 23 October 2010.

The Fun Walk and Information Day was hosted by both the Section Sports Medicine and the Institute for Sports Research. The event, attended by more than 140 keen walkers, took place at the LC de Villiers Sports Centre. Although the weather forecast had predicted rain on that particular day, the universe seemed to be on our side, playing its part in bringing along a beaming sun and clear skies. After a brisk 3.8km walk through the scenic LC de Villiers premises, participants were delighted to participate in the Health and Fitness Exhibition that followed. The foyer of the sports centre was transformed into an exhibition area boasting numerous exciting and informative stands. The medical exhibition consisted of informative posters and pamphlets on hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, lung diseases and cancers, all of which benefit from prescribed exercise regimes. Two doctors, including respected sports physician and rheumatologist Dr Christa Janse Van Rensburg, were kept busy answering questions related to disease and physical activity. Within the medical exhibition, participants were also able to get their blood pressure, blood glucose and blood cholesterol tested. The footlevellers station was particularly

popular amongst the participants. At this station, participants were able to get their feet digital scanned to assess for weight bearing patterns known to cause foot, knee, hip and back problems. The biokinetics exhibition was highly informative as many participants finally learned the role of sports science in prescribing exercise and rehabilitation programmes. The 'Getting Started' pamphlet given to all participants in the goodie bags, gives a detailed step by step guideline to planning and kick-starting an individualized exercise programme - an excellent tool for anyone wanting to get active. The biokinetics exhibition area also offered body height and weight measurements as well as demonstrations on certain sports science testing machines. As if this wasn't enough, the exhibition also featured an informative nutrition stand, physiotherapy stand, ISR gym and Tuks Student gym stands. All in all, the event was a raging success, with feedback suggesting similar events should be planned every quarter at least! A huge thank you to the University of Pretoria's Sports Medicine and ISR for initiating this internal campaign and working hard to ensure the event was a success. Muelmed hospital and Dischem pharmacy must be commended on their enthusiasm and provision of volunteers to assist on the day. A final thank you to Tuks Student gym and the specialists from the High Performance Centre (Sports Science, Nutrition and Physiotherapy) who were the cherry on top of the success cake! 🍌