

All the ways that Dietitians Do Prevention

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Across the world, health and social care services are under stress; and in South Africa, the inaccessibility of quality health care for many people remains one of the country's intractable problems. These pressures have intensified the focus on the prevention of disease as the key driver of public health. At the forefront of prevention is food. As one of the only healthcare professionals trained and qualified to interpret the latest nutrition science and dietary guidelines, dietitians play multiple roles in the prevention of diseases.

Dietitians Do Prevention is the theme of the 2018 Dietitians Week which will be held from 4-8 June. To create awareness, [ADSA \(Association for Dietetics in South Africa\)](#) joined [SASPEN \(South African Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition\)](#), [ENASA \(Enteral Nutrition Association of South African\)](#) and [HDIG \(Hospital Dietitian Interest Group\)](#) in highlighting the six major ways that Dietitians Do Prevention and help to reduce the burden of disease in South Africa through their vital work.

ADSA spokesperson Jessica Byrne points out that: "Not many people are aware that dietitians, who must be registered with the HPCSA (Health Professions Council of South Africa) in order to practice their profession, are employed across many different sectors from industry to communities; as well as in health, research and educational institutions. Across the board they play a key role in disease prevention."

The six ways that SA Dietitians Do Prevention, are:

Guidance during first 1000 days – Dietitians support expecting mothers to promote healthy pregnancies and prevent complications, but their work doesn't end there. Jessica Byrne says: "Due to the country's suboptimal rates of breastfeeding the dietitian's promotion of breastfeeding, monitoring of infant growth and ongoing guidance as a baby starts to also consume solids has become critical prevention work. Breastfeeding not only provides the best source of nutrition for a baby but also promotes growth and enhances the vulnerable immune systems of babies to help prevent disease."

Public health and primary prevention – Healthy eating and hydration is essential for health. Dietitians work to educate the general public on good food choices to maintain their health, which helps prevent illnesses and avoid diet-related conditions such as diabetes, malnutrition or obesity. Dietitians do prevention at community level through the promotion of household food security and the drive to eliminate hunger. Various community projects involve the services of a dietitian.

Mental health and addiction recovery – Good nutrition and a healthy diet can impact positively on both the prevention and management of mental health conditions, including helping to support recovery and prevent relapse in the case of addiction.

Hospital, rehab and home-based care – "You will find dietitians working right across the health care system," says Alta Kloppers, spokesperson for HDIG. "This is because nutrition plays such an important role in survival, recovery, rehabilitation and symptom relief, as well as reducing the risks of further illnesses and preventing more admissions to hospital and other health care services." Dietitians do prevention through screening of hospitalised patients to identify patients at risk of developing malnutrition, and providing specialised nutrition interventions to manage specific diseases and conditions.

Optimising health and secondary prevention – Dietitians do prevention by helping people with existing conditions such as diabetes, kidney failure or dementia to optimise their nutrition in order to get relief from symptoms, prevent complications and enhance their quality of life. This will include individualised dietary advice and appropriate follow-up and monitoring.

Making every contact count through healthy conversations - Dietitians don't just advise on diet and nutrition when they do prevention. Instead they engage also with clients on the other issues related to good health such as the importance of physical activity and not smoking. They also take into account the social and emotional factors that can easily contribute to a client's need for a healthier lifestyle. Conversations with dietitians can then easily direct people to where they can also access professional help for the non-dietary issues that also impact on disease prevention.

“The important message of this year’s Dietitian’s Week,” says Lizl Veldsman SASPEN’s spokesperson, “is that it is impossible to separate disease prevention from nutrition and therefore, from the work of a dietitian.”

Lynne Mincher, ENASA spokesperson agrees: “Good nutrition is the foundation of prevention and recovery. Whether you are talking about supporting breastfeeding tube-feeding or oral nutritional supplements, a person recovering from an operation or guiding someone with a chronic condition such as diabetes, we need that expertise of the dietitian right at the frontlines of prevention.”

A collection of [“Dietitians Do Prevention” recipes](http://www.adsa.org.za/Public/DietitiansWeek2018.aspx) by South African dietitians has been published and can be downloaded here: www.adsa.org.za/Public/DietitiansWeek2018.aspx

It includes 39 recipes, covering breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. Each recipe comes with a prevention message.



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The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) is the professional organisation for Registered Dietitians. The primary aims of the Association are to serve the interests of dietitians in South Africa and promote the nutritional well being of the community.

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