

Press Release:

Immediate Release: International Experts Provide a Clear Message, School Uniforms and Books are not enough to Realise our Children's Potential

130 delegates at the 2nd Yoghurt Summit held in Johannesburg on the 4th September heard experts talk on how good eating habits could save our children from developing diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. No good education, no uniforms and books will stand any measure, if children are not well and do not live healthy lives to fulfil their dreams.

Realising Children's Potential was the theme of the second annual Yoghurt Summit, a collaboration by Danone. This theme was chosen to draw attention to the fact that the time for parents to act is now, and that the bad outlook on health can be reversed.

Stats SA's latest publication on causes of death in South Africa ranks diabetes second only to tuberculosis as an underlying natural cause of death. Type 2 diabetes and insulin resistance is on the rise with diet and lifestyle factors being large contributors to this condition. But why the interest in yoghurt and diabetes?

Several population studies have consistently shown an inverse association between yoghurt consumption and type 2 diabetes. "The science supporting this is strong and cannot be ignored," says Dr Andre Marette, Scientific Director at the Institute of Nutrition and Functional Foods, Laval University, Quebec, Canada. He talks of "yoghurt being more than the sum of its individual parts. Yoghurt is a matrix of good nutrients, it contains protein, B vitamins, calcium and good live cultures or ferments, all this put together in one single food makes it a versatile and a great everyday addition to offering protection against developing long-term illness. Further, dairy attributes of calcium, protein and other bioactive components may modify the effects on LDL (bad) cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure and energy balance." "This is promising news that at least one can approve a food that children love and that is good for them", concluded co-presenter, Lebo Matshego-Roda, a nutritionist and researcher at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Matshego-Roda reminded the audience that we can also no longer ignore the nutrient deficiencies that our children are experiencing and the significance this has in developing the brain, protecting their body's immunity and helping them develop to their potential. South African children are simply not eating enough dairy, calcium, fruit and vegetables and not drinking enough water, she said. Add bad habits like

breakfast skipping and being inactive and the result is the alarming statistic that 14% of children aged 6 to 14 years are overweight or obese. She reminded the audience that obesity in children, as is the case with adults, is clearly associated with hypertension, high cholesterol levels, chronic inflammation and insulin resistance.

A recent study of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey in the UK found that yoghurt consumption was associated with higher nutrient intake, better diet quality and a favourable metabolic rate in children. This supports the evidence for the South African Food-Based Dietary Guideline to have milk, maas or yoghurt every day.

On the topic of unhealthy weight, Professor Angelo Tremblay, Department of Kinesiology at the Laval University in Quebec, looked at how some surprising deficiencies have links to obesity. These include sleep deprivation, low calcium and dairy intake, and insufficient vitamins in the diet. By contrast, eating yoghurt regularly has been shown to increase nutrients in the diet, help with insomnia (thanks to the protein and calcium it contains) and have a beneficial impact on BMI.

It is well known that the calcium and protein in dairy lessen cravings by reducing the production of hormones like peptide tyrosine (PYY) and, being low-GI, dairy also makes us feel full for longer. The professor motivated his peer academic attendees to do more local research to show how certain foods, including yoghurt, could play a role in improving metabolic fitness. With enough clinical papers, we can gain more support for the evidence that certain foods must be included in a daily diet. These guidelines should be in the hands of all parents and caregivers of children who have a strong responsibility to nurture the future health of South Africans.

Creative parenting expert Nikki Bush acknowledged the challenges parents must have to feed children. However, she did not waiver, the ball is in moms (all parents and caregivers) court to put right the past inequalities of bad eating practices. Yes, parents are time-starved and may have just a few hours a day with their children, which may lead to negative attention-seeking behaviour from children, she said: "Children manipulate and seek attention when things feel out of control and the main areas in which they do this are with eating, toileting and going to sleep. These are warning signs that they are not feeling secure in some way."

Bush reminded the audience that we negotiate too much with children around food. "We get over-emotional about children and eating issues. If they don't want to eat something, we need to remain calm and direct them to bread and water in the kitchen. Parents should avoid overcompensating with food by offering too many food choices. If you do, you are making children take an adult role, putting them in control. Children prefer and need the security of boundaries and limited choices."

Bush concluded the Yoghurt Summit with practical ideas on how to raise healthy eaters:

Bring them into the kitchen to help with the cooking. They are far more likely to eat what they have helped to prepare because they are proud of their efforts.

Encourage children to get involved in shopping for food – it's a great way to help them to buy into their own nutritional process.

Eat together with your children from a young age. Mealtimes can become moments of belonging and togetherness that have the power to create emotional bonds and warm fuzzy memories, not just because of the ritual of eating, but because of the time spent together.

She finally encouraged parents to take the Pledge for Healthy Change by visiting www.knowyouryoghurt.co.za

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References available on request

Acknowledgements

In September 2018, the South African Yoghurt in Nutrition Initiative (SAYINI) hosted the 2nd South African Yoghurt Summit: Realising Children's Potential, where local and international speakers shared emerging science on the role of nutrition in raising healthy children. SAYINI aims to uncover scientific data related to yoghurt, stimulate new research and identify gaps in our understanding on the health effects of this food category, and to disseminate this information to relevant healthcare professionals and the public.