

With health, we are what we eat

ONE of the most comprehensive health surveys done in South Africa by the Human Sciences Research Council found the Eastern Cape was one of a few provinces where an increase in high blood pressure and strokes was noted between 2003 and 2012.

During the comprehensive study, only 24% of Eastern Cape residents rated their health as very good, 47% as good and 8.2% as bad and very bad.

Happy Body lifestyle and nutrition coach Tanya Wyatt said many of the health problems reported to her by residents were nutrition and lifestyle related. She noticed, for instance, that people were eating "way too much salt". Often, she said, they were unaware of the high salt content in processed foods in particular.

Wyatt believed stress was another contributor. The same study found the province had among the highest incidence of diabetes – which was also frequently diet related.

Nicky Hartel from The Healthroom has found there is much room for improved education in child nutrition in the city.

"It would be excellent if we could make parents aware that giving their child processed yogurt and cereal is not necessarily healthy."

"I was surprised by how packed our last cooking demo was," Wyatt added.

Wyatt and a local chef have been running evenings at which people can learn how to cook healthy food.

"We charged R600 a head, which wasn't cheap, but everyone was riveted and it made us realise how valuable this type of information is." She said when it came to good nutrition there were several stumbling blocks.

"People don't really have an idea what healthy food looks like – it's a minefield of information out there. They feel they have too much on their plate already without

having to think up new recipes and make healthy food. "A great many of my clients are also dehydrated and dehydration will lead the body to use neurotransmitters

such as serotonin – the 'happy hormone' – instead of water to remove waste from the cells.

"This means serotonin is lost through urine. Depression can therefore be helped by simply remaining hydrated," Wyatt said.

"People are unhappy because they've been taught to feel bad or guilty or remorseful when eating it.

"I teach a very different approach to food and that is to eat with love and gratitude, whether it's a piece of cheesecake or a salad."

"This changes everything about the food and eating experience and can lead people down a very different path when it comes to self-acceptance," Wyatt said.

PORT Elizabeth was recently declared the second fittest city in South Africa following a countrywide survey by Discovery. But do we really measure up to being a health mecca when you look at what we eat, how zen-like we feel, how much we light up and what we do to cope in times of crisis? These are among the criteria used by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to determine how healthy cities are. **Estelle Ellis** tries to find out how healthy Port Elizabeth really is.



LIVING THE GOOD LIFE: Happy Body lifestyle and nutrition coach Tanya Wyatt believes many of the health problems reported to her were nutrition and lifestyle related

Support systems key to emotional health

ONE of the measurements used by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to determine the emotional health of city dwellers is their connection to their communities and access to support systems should they need them.

Studies referred to by the WHO have shown emotional connectivity improves the survival chances of people with potentially fatal diseases like cancer, besides improving resilience and reducing stress.

Community activist and councillor John Preller said in his experience people in Port Elizabeth needed this connectivity to each other and to their communities and were actively seeking it.

"It does help people to grow. It gives them a purpose in life and is good for mental health," Preller said.

He said there were a number of well-functioning support groups in the city where people could find the support needed to get to a healthier place in their lives.

"The only problem I see is that we must create a platform for these community organisations and support groups. It would be great if people had a central database from where they could access all the help and support they needed," Preller said.

Happy Body Nutrition and Lifestyle coach Tanya Wyatt said from what she had seen many Port Elizabeth residents were far from happy.

"I do find that a huge percentage of my clients are clinically depressed. Many people in town have reached a desperation point," Wyatt said.

"I'm not exactly mainstream, so people have tried a lot of things before they get to me, but when they do get to me they're prepared to try anything."

Supporting Wyatt's experience is the most comprehensive study done on the health of South Africans over the past decade, in which researchers from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) found that older people and also women in Port Elizabeth were particularly vulnerable to psychological distress.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Yoga instructor Tanya Kemp runs a studio in Greenshields Park and says more people are signing up

Yoga found to benefit both body and brain

US STUDIES on the impact of yoga on mind and body have shown it is highly beneficial in reducing pain and fatigue, and improving brain functioning and concentration.

A National Health Interview Survey conducted in the US last year found yoga to be one of the top 10 complementary health approaches among adults.

Tanya Kemp, yoga instructor and owner of the Heal Love Yoga studio in Greenshields Park, has seen growing interest in yoga among Port Elizabeth residents since

opening her studio here in March.

"When I came here in January, I was surprised at how few people practised yoga," she said.

"When I tried to open my studio I at first encountered a lot of resistance, mostly from people who said it was against the Christian religion."

Just a few months later, she said, the tide was already turning.

"Some of my classes are now full, and more and more people are signing up for courses, saying they can see and feel the difference," Kemp said.