

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Diet and Lifestyle Changes During the Covid-19 Pandemic Among Healthcare Professionals in the Eastern Cape Province.

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Abstract

The unprecedented COVID-19 era was one that posed drastic changes and challenges to healthcare professionals and the healthcare system at large. During disastrous events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, psychosocial stress was expected in healthcare professionals along with the development of different coping mechanisms. The increased pressure and expectation from the healthcare system and the public, to ensure the continuation of care for patients while, ensuring that they themselves do not become patients, further increase stress and adversely affect mental and physical health. This can lead to decreasing performance and efficacy at work. Healthy dietary habits and physical activity are known to play significant roles in supporting mental health and the immune system by improving its response to infections. Therefore, it is important to ensure preparedness and improve wellness among these individuals in the event of future pandemics.

The objectives of this quantitative, descriptive study were to determine the perceived changes of dietary and lifestyle habits in a sample of 348 healthcare professional during the COVID-19 pandemic and to investigate how environmental, physical, and social factors had contributed to the perceived diet and lifestyle changes.

The findings indicated that healthcare professionals' dietary habits and lifestyle were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 38% (n=131) had indicated that their weight had increased, they consumed more alcohol and fast foods and participated in less exercise. There was a high caffeine consumption and decreased sleep which could adversely affect healthcare professionals' productivity, resilience and mental health. The negative impacts posed by the pandemic still needs to be mitigated as it has the potential to increase the burden of non-communicable diseases and cause even more burden to the healthcare system. Authorities need to coordinate and develop sustainable programmes relating to coping mechanisms during any state of disaster and support wellness initiatives. Dietitians should be involved in the continued coordination and promote healthy eating through regular training and education of other healthcare professional.

Key words: Healthcare professionals, lifestyle, diet, COVID-19, Nutrition.