

# More than a woman

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The 21st-century woman has achieved milestones her foremothers couldn't fathom.



She has a choice in career path, global citizenship coupled with cultural intelligence, can work from home (while preparing dinner); and even has options in pregnancy – to carry her spawn (within) herself or select a suitable surrogate. These are liberties women before her paved for her to enjoy. However, within the victories, the 21st-century woman needs to take better care of her health holistically and proactively. While popular culture positions weight management as a cosmetic concern, medical research states that obesity is a disease and SA women are at risk.

A study by the University of the Western Cape (UWC) states that more than half of SA women are clinically obese, carrying excess fat or excess adipose tissue. Almost half (45.2%) are physically inactive. It is mainly due to 'nutrition transitions' (urbanisation, lifestyle changes, corporate concentration), which lead to greater consumption of processed and packaged food, i.e., take-out.

It's not solely the convenience of fast-food impacting women's food choices. Psycho-social dimensions of food also shape market demand as fast-food consumption is seen as a symbol of wealth. Conversely, the consumption of legumes and indigenous crops is perceived as a sign of poverty.

Five of the leading causes of death in SA are directly linked to nutrition and, naturally, carrying excess fatty tissue can cause health risks such as type two diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure and coronary heart disease. After HIV/Aids, heart disease and stroke are SA's biggest killers, with women 'dying young' due to late or no diagnosis.

Late diagnosis or the complete absence of early medical screening is a recurring theme for many of the health risks women face, such as mental health, STDs and maternal healthcare. In SA, women's lives have been characterised by chronic social adversity, race or class and gender oppression and unequal access to resources. For example, most public healthcare facilities are in urban areas, while many women are based in rural areas.

World Health Organisation (WHO) research revealed that the barrier to healthcare services leads to 141 out of every 100,000 women dying from pregnancy complications and childbirth due to delays in getting prenatal care services.

In 2013, breast cancer and cancers of the female genital tract accounted for 0.7 % and 1% of all deaths in SA,

respectively, resulting in breast and cervical cancer being identified as national priorities. Awareness of the symptoms and early detection through screening can help doctors discover cancer earlier when it's easier to treat or even cure. According to the Centres for Disease Control, screenings and vaccines can now prevent 93% of cervical cancers.



## The importance of a Pap Smear

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Proactive health management can only occur when women are empowered with health information in non-judgemental settings, yet 46% of women didn't feel prepared for menopause because they didn't know what the symptoms are.

To inform and educate women, pulling from credible health research about women is a milestone today's women shouldn't take for granted. According to Tufts Medical Centre in the US, years ago, women were often excluded from research studies because of the belief that their menstrual cycles would 'confuse' the results. As a result, research was often done on men and applied to women. Thank goodness things have drastically changed.

At Intercare, we know women experience unique health issues and conditions – from pregnancy, menopause, osteoporosis to gynaecological conditions such as uterine fibroids. That's why we enable women to take charge of their health by working in partnership with their doctor, in educating themselves on health issues and their holistic well-being. Women also have access to doctors with a particular interest in women's health. <https://www.intercare.co.za/specialised-services/womens-health>

Happy Women's Month!

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