



Press Release



Inspire Engage Create

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Healthy lifestyles for most teenagers in South Africa but the prevalence of alcohol, smoking and drugs is a worry

TNS Research Surveys, South Africa's leading marketing and social insights company, has recently conducted a survey of South African teenagers. The study was conducted amongst a sample of 1 000 South African teenagers, aged 13 to 19 years of age, from the seven major metropolitan areas of South Africa, interviewing them face-to-face in their homes, and has a margin of error of under 3.5%.

Looking at how healthy teenagers' lifestyles are, it seems that most South African teenagers know and understand what it takes to be healthy. Even if they include some unhealthy activities in their lives, they have a very positive attitude towards eating healthily and keeping fit by doing physical activities.

Knowing what it takes to be healthy

Almost all teens (over nine out of ten) feel that it is important to be active and exercise and that it's important to eat healthy foods. "Eating healthy" and staying physically fit is a priority amongst teens as 89% say that they consider themselves physically fit, 74% say that they include fruit and vegetables in their diet and 88% say that they take care of their health. However, it seems that Indian/Asian teenagers include significantly fewer fruits and vegetables in their diet compared to black, white and coloured teenagers, with 87% of white teens, 75% of black teens, 70% of coloured teens and only 46% of Indian/Asian teens saying they include fruits and vegetables in their diet.

Seventy-seven percent of South African teenagers say that they like playing sports and 53% say that they like to spend their weekends playing sport and being active in this way.

Eighty-eight percent say that it is important to watch and maintain a healthy weight and 87% say their weight is about right for their age and height.

These attitudes to health and physical activity are good news; however, there do seem to be some teens who engage in some unhealthy activities.

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Some unhealthy activities

Although most South African teens admit to being healthy by eating properly and exercising, 78% say they enjoy eating take-away and junk food and 47% say they get little or no physical exercise. The incidence of junk food consumers rises amongst 14 year olds, with 86% of them saying that they enjoy junk food. Fifty-three percent of 19 year olds say they get little or no physical exercise. Forty-five percent of teenagers say that they spend at least a part of their pocket money on fast-food and takeaways and 73% spend it on sweets and snacks. Further, these two items received by far the highest levels of mention in terms of items on which teens spend their money. These statistics are worrying considering the growing levels of obesity in South Africa, especially amongst young people.

Looking at the more serious, unhealthy and addictive vices, 29% say that a lot of their friends smoke, 28% say that a lot of their friends drink alcohol and 8% say that a lot of their friends take drugs: more than a quarter of the teenage population have friends who are drinking and smoking.

The incidences per area, for teens **who have friends who smoke**, are as follows:

- Gauteng 27%
 - Johannesburg and environs 24%
 - Johannesburg 23%
 - East Rand 28%
 - West Rand 16%
 - Soweto 33%
 - Vaal Triangle and South Rand 14%
 - Pretoria 36%
- Cape Town 44% (Highest)
- Durban 23%
- Eastern Cape 29%
 - Port Elizabeth 29%
 - East London 30%
- Bloemfontein 13% (Lowest)

These teens, with friends who smoke, are predominantly in Cape Town.

The incidences per age are as follows:

- Age 13: 15%
- Age 14: 9%
- Ages 15-16: 31%
- Ages 17-18: 37%
- Age 19: 43%

The incidence of having friends who smoke increases rapidly with age but even amongst the youngest, the prevalence of smoking is of concern.



The incidences per area, for teens **who have friends who drink alcohol**, are as follows:

- Gauteng 29%
 - Johannesburg and environs 29%
 - Johannesburg 23%
 - East Rand 27%
 - West Rand 19%
 - Soweto 40% (Highest)
 - Vaal Triangle and South Rand 18%
 - Pretoria 34%
- Cape Town 31%
- Durban 25%
- Eastern Cape 26%
 - Port Elizabeth 27%
 - East London 23%
- Bloemfontein 13% (Lowest)

The teens with friends who drink alcohol are predominantly in Soweto, where figures are very high.

The incidences per age are as follows:

- Age 13: 8%
- Age 14: 12%
- Ages 15-16: 29%
- Ages 17-18: 35%
- Age 19: 46%

As with friends who smoke, the incidence of having friends who drink alcohol increases with age. Again, though, even the youngest have a relatively high incidence of friends who smoke.

The incidences per area, for teens **who have friends who take drugs**, are as follows:

- Gauteng 8%
 - Johannesburg and environs 7%
 - Johannesburg 5%
 - East Rand 10%
 - West Rand 0% (Lowest)
 - Soweto 6%
 - Vaal Triangle and South Rand 8%
 - Pretoria 10%
- Cape Town 12%
- Durban 5%
- Eastern Cape 9%
 - Port Elizabeth 5%
 - East London 17% (Highest)
- Bloemfontein 3%

More...



Teens with friends who take drugs are predominantly in East London.

The incidences per age are as follows:

- Age 13: 5%
- Age 14: 6%
- Ages 15-16: 11%
- Ages 17-18: 8%
- Age 19: 8%

The incidence of having friends who take drugs is highest amongst 15-16 year old teens.

Conclusion

Although it is worrying that a quarter of teenagers are spending time with friends who consume alcohol and smoke cigarettes, there are many teenagers who have the right attitude towards healthy living that includes eating right and getting enough exercise.

There are also many teens who enjoy eating and spending money on junk food. This is counterintuitive since so many teens are keen on healthy living and eating right. However, this love for fast-food may refer to a fast-food, fast-paced culture amongst teenagers. Teenagers are growing up in a fast-paced society and this may reflect in their activities as well as in their love for fast-foods.

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