

## **The rise of social media and pseudo healthy-eating-info**

There is a plethora of healthy-eating mumbo-jumbo being vomited onto the web every single day and if you take into context the rapidly changing landscape of digital interaction with the internet by South African users it's frightening to think about where we are all getting our nutrition information.

Given multiple data sets, it's safe to estimate that close to 13 million unique users (across both fixed and mobile) accessed the net over a 30 day period in 2013. 2013 was "the Year Mobile Matured" in South Africa, and internet access can no longer be seen as the realm of the privileged few who could afford fixed line access. It's expected that more than half the adult population will be regularly using the internet by the middle of this year. With the falling cost of access via mobile devices, the RSA internet user profile will become more multilingual and representative of the country's total demographic with local solutions to niche interest areas. Social media is also growing in RSA, particularly Twitter and Facebook as users become more active through mobile devices. In Africa more people have access to mobile devices than clean drinking water (yes its true ... read it again). More than half internet access in RSA is through mobile devices and this is geared to swing even more in favour of mobile in the next few years. Nearly 1.25 million hand sets are sold each month in RSA. The highest group of mobile web users in RSA are in LSM 6 with a black, mid 20s & slight male skew.

All in all - this space is becoming increasingly important on the impact of South Africans, from all walks of life, as they find and use information on health and nutrition from the internet. As I browse these various platforms and listen/watch/read more and more information in this space I am becoming increasingly concerned as a health care professional, for I am faced with more rubbish than I can explain on topics that I happen to know a great deal about.

So what does that mean for you, the average (but very important and increasingly confused) South African person looking for information on nutrition and healthy eating?

Here are my top 5 top-tips on gathering "free" information on healthy eating.

1. Search for content that is written or endorsed by nutrition experts and health care professionals. These are registered Dietitians and Nutritionists. That means that are registered with the 'Health Professionals Council of South Africa'.
2. Get to know your good quality sources of information and subscribe to keep up with the trends (some good examples are ADSA, NSSA, top magazines that have nutrition articles written by Dietitians and not fly-by-night pseudo-nutrition fanatics)
3. Follow Dietician and Nutritionist Blogs that generate weekly content that is relevant to you. You have specific needs and you need information specific to you. If you are a pregnant lady, an older gentleman or a teenager guy or girl – your needs are different and you need advice specific to you.
4. Give feedback to your social media/internet info-giving partners. We want to know what you need and are looking for. Ask us the questions and give us some insight into your needs/concerns/ideas and we will do your best to respond with appropriate information or direct you to a good source.

5. Not all health or nutrition articles have the necessary scientific backing they need. It's important to have a spread of science to resource good nutrition information. Always keep an eye on this, and check out the references from an article or healthy eating tool to give you an idea if the writer has gone to the needed effort to substantiate material properly.

Lastly I want to encourage you to challenge and ask questions. If your mates are talking about health or nutrition ask them where they are getting their information from and who is providing it and what their credentials are.

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Sources:

- Nielsen's
- Effective Measure
- World Wide Worx
- AMPS (All Media and Products Study)
- World Internet Stats