

GOING GREEN AND LEAN IN 2018

HEALTH trends come and go. While some may last the whole year, others are short-lived and seasonal.

With the new year having just started, many people have made it their mission to stay healthy.

We spoke to nutrition experts about what's trendy this year in the world of health, and which trends to keep from last year and which ones to discard.

Mbali Mapholi, a registered dietitian and spokeswoman for the Association for Dietetics in South Africa, says many of the health trends we saw last year will be making a comeback.

She predicts that door-to-door meal deliveries or meal kits that come with ingredients and recipes will be a growing trend.

"Most people lead busy lifestyles and work longer hours, but because they still want healthy, structured eating, this option becomes a solution," says Mapholi.

Fitness is also on many people's lips this year.

"Improving fitness will be a goal for many people in 2018.

"The fitness trend of tracking steps for reward programmes will continue," she says.

Given the fact that gadgets play a major role in the fitness lifestyle, many people are expected to buy fit bands, download fitness apps on their smartphone or use other devices that track their activity levels for rewards and points.

And for many, weekend park runs or walks around the neighbourhood are becoming more popular.

"Gym membership can be very expensive and newer gyms with cheaper monthly subscriptions have now emerged."

Another prediction is that many people will follow super-food health trends.

"We saw a couple of these hit our South African shores in 2017.

"Common super foods that were popular last year that will continue to trend this year include turmeric golden milk, activated charcoal, apple cider

This year's health food trends require lifestyle changes with some sacrifices, writes **Viwe Ndongeni**

vinegar, kefir, kombucha, kale and sea weed."

A newer super-food trend that many South African coffee shops and restaurants may be including this year is matcha – a powder ground from green tea leaves.

This product is used to make cappuccinos, some baked products and many more foods.

Organic or "untouched" foods with no preservatives, additives and colouring, will also become increasingly popular, while whole foods, such as full-cream dairy products, are trendier compared with low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Megan Lee, of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, says while the trusted DASH diet and Mediterranean diet still top the yearly charts as the healthiest diets, plant-based eating is becoming increasingly popular.

For most people, shunning all animal foods may be a step too far, and thus the flexitarian trend continues to grow.

For the unacquainted, trying out meatless or green Monday could be a gentle introduction to eating less meat and more vegetables.

"It's important to remember that cutting out animal products is not synonymous with healthy eating, but doing it cleverly can definitely have health benefits," says Lee.

She says green eating is also more environmentally conscious, and often this trend overlaps with eating more seasonal, locally produced and lesser-processed foods.

Healthy food in general has seen a surge in popularity.

There are many elements to this, such as the nutrient content of foods, how foods are grown, and the health benefits of specific foods.

It's important to remember that the benefits of super foods are often exaggerated.

Within that context, it's often fun to experiment with new ingredients that improve nutritional variety and introduce new tastes.

Gut health is also one of the trends that South Africans are obsessing about, and this trend is set to continue in 2018, as people are becoming more aware about the importance of a healthy digestive system.

"Dietary fibre and probiotics, especially from fermented foods and beverages such as kombucha, will therefore continue to be a health trend as they promote healthy gut microflora."

Like many other experts, Lee predicts that the gadget trend will make a comeback because it provides personalised weight loss advice.

"Various apps, some based on scientific studies, can help to set goals and promote positive behaviour change. Some even offer your own health coach or dietitian on call when you need them."

What diet trends can we expect in 2018? Mapholi lists the following:

GLUTEN-FREE DIET

Gluten-free diets have emerged in recent years, and this trend is likely to continue in 2018.

Gluten-free diets are necessary for people with diagnosed celiac disease or gluten sensitivity... not necessarily for weight-loss purposes.

"Gluten is a protein found mostly in wheat, barley, rye and some additives. Unfortunately, eliminating these foods from the diet does not necessarily result in lower calorie intake or induce weight loss.

"In fact, people who need gluten-free

diets should be monitored by a registered dietitian, as the diet can be deficient in some nutrients."

INTERMITTENT FASTING

We can expect to see the diet trend of intermittent fasting continue in 2018. Intermittent fasting means not eating anything for certain time intervals to achieve weight loss.

People following this diet trend might lose some weight because of reduced total food intake from skipped meals.

But there is no concrete evidence to support this diet trend as an approach to sustained weight loss long-term.

Dietitians recommend three meals a day with snack only when hungry instead of snacking all day.

CLEAN EATING

Clean eating began with good intentions where people choose whole foods, which are unprocessed, including home-cooked meals.

But for some this trend has developed into an obsession with people only eating foods that are "pure" and is now associated with restricting certain foods – something that can lead to deficiencies.

While cutting back on highly processed foods is a good idea, there is nothing wrong with having some processed foods in your diet from time to time.

To maintain a healthy lifestyle for the whole family all year long, Lee says keeping the whole family healthy requires parents to take the lead and involves more than just healthy eating but should also include encouraging exercise and limiting screen time, and giving up bad habits such as smoking.

Once these new habits are ingrained, you can reassess what the next step should be.

Lifestyle changes can include ditching sugary drinks for water, swapping to wholegrain starches, replacing a couple of weekly meat dishes with legumes, or starting to pack a healthy lunch for work.

NEW YEAR, NEW ME: Pack a healthy lunch for work, with added fruit, and keep your water bottle close by.

PICTURE: MODERNIST CUISINE/LLC/CHRIS HOOVER/AP