



Pagophagia when ice is not available – drink cold water

To the Editor: Louw *et al.*¹ reported in the November issue of *SAMJ* that pagophagia (pica for ice) was present in 9 out of 16 patients with iron deficiency and some form of pica. In the adult haematology service at Universitas Tertiary Hospital, I have made the anecdotal observation that indigent patients with iron deficiency often have a variant of pagophagia: if they do not have access to freezers and ice, they often drink copious volumes of the coldest water they can obtain. Aristotle and Hippocrates as well as authors from more recent centuries warned against the excessive intake of cold water and ice.² They probably associated pagophagia with manifestations of iron deficiency.

Nojilana *et al.*³ estimated that iron deficiency anaemia is responsible for a loss of as much as 0.9 - 1.3% disability-adjusted life-years in South Africa. Only 65.6% of South African households have a refrigerator, according to the All Media and Products Survey (AMPS), commissioned by the South African Advertising Research Foundation in 2004.⁴ Therefore, only 65.6% of households have ready access to ice. It is possible that excessive consumption of cold water is a common form of pagophagia in South Africa.

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