

“The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don’t want, drink what you don’t like and do what you’d rather not.”

– Mark Twain



Dear Member

And before you know it, another holiday is upon us. To those who are celebrating Easter, we wish you a good holiday. And to everyone else please enjoy the time-off safely, whether you are travelling or indulging. In this issue, we have some advice for diabetics who can’t resist the chocolately Easter goodies. And being so close to winter, we also tackle the subject of the Flu Shot and debunk some popular myths. This month we also take a look at back and neck pain and we’ve also got a special feature for you on children’s mental health.

Wishing you a happy read and a wonderful Easter.

POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team



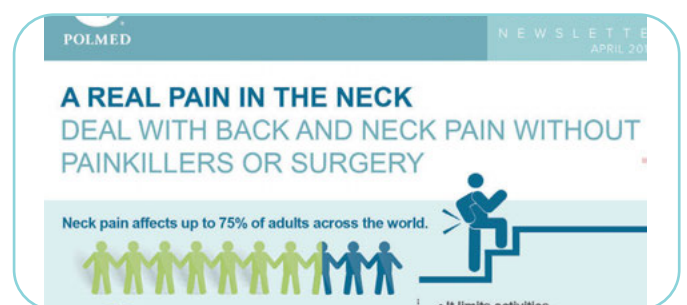
SHOOTING DOWN COMMON 'FLU SHOT' MYTHS
DON'T LET THESE MYTHS PREVENT YOU FROM STAYING HEALTHY THIS WINTER

The best way to protect yourself from influenza is to get a flu vaccine, especially if you suffer from a chronic condition.

SHOOTING DOWN COMMON FLU SHOT

Getting the flu vaccination could be your best weapon against influenza this year. Don't let some common misconceptions stop you from getting your Flu Shot.

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A REAL PAIN IN THE NECK
DEAL WITH BACK AND NECK PAIN WITHOUT PAINKILLERS OR SURGERY

Neck pain affects up to 75% of adults across the world.

A REAL PAIN IN THE NECK

Chronic back and neck pain are daily realities for many people. In this article we look at some remedies that don't include surgery or painkillers.

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YOUR DIABETES RULES FOR EASTER

When candy eggs and tasty buns beckon, it's good to have some rules to play with, especially if you suffer from Diabetes.

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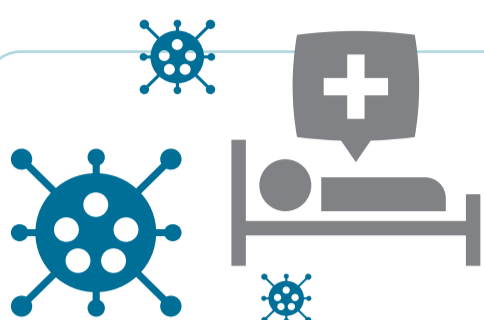
WHEN OUR CHILDREN SUFFER

Mental health issues in children are real. Research shows that almost 2.5% of school children suffer from depression and stress.

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SHOOTING DOWN COMMON 'FLU SHOT' MYTHS

DON'T LET THESE MYTHS PREVENT YOU FROM STAYING HEALTHY THIS WINTER



The best way to protect yourself from influenza is to get a flu vaccine, especially if you suffer from a chronic condition.

However, people with severe, life-threatening allergies to the flu vaccine (or any ingredient in the vaccine) shouldn't get vaccinated.

MYTH 1: I'LL GET SICK IF I GET THE VACCINATION.



Not true – these vaccines are either made from inactive flu viruses or genetic material that comes from the viruses. They don't contain live microorganisms that can make you ill. If you do get flu symptoms, it could be because you were exposed to the virus shortly before getting the vaccine, or within the 2-week period that it takes to build immunity.

NB: Get your shot early in the season (April) because the antibodies take two weeks to build up.

MYTH 2: THE FLU ISN'T FATAL.



Not true – between 291 000 and 646 000 people die globally every year from respiratory illnesses related to seasonal flu. People over the age of 75 and adults living in low-income countries are particularly at risk.

MYTH 3: I HAD THE VACCINE LAST YEAR, SO I DON'T NEED IT AGAIN.



Not true – your body's response to the vaccine diminishes over time. You must get your flu vaccination annually. Every year the influenza strains mutate so this year's virus will be different to last year's.

MYTH 4: I SHOULDN'T GET THE FLU SHOT WHEN I'M PREGNANT.



Not true – unless you are allergic to the vaccine, the flu shot can help protect you and your unborn baby. It even helps prevent your little one from getting the flu after birth (the mother passes antibodies on to the baby during pregnancy.)

If you don't get the vaccine, and you get flu – there's a risk that the flu might progress to pneumonia. The flu might also harm your baby by causing premature birth or a low birth weight.

MYTH 5: IT'S RISKY TO GET THE FLU SHOT WHEN I HAVE A CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITION.



Not true – if you have one of the following chronic health conditions, you will really benefit from the flu shot to help prevent serious medical complications:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Lung disease (e.g. asthma, emphysema or chronic bronchitis)
- Diabetes

GOOD TO KNOW



Set a reminder on your phone or desktop calendar to have your flu vaccination at your nearest pharmacy or clinic as soon as it becomes available every year.



- Flu germs are on most surfaces and particularly on door handles, taps and lift buttons. Wash your hands regularly with warm soap and water for 15 - 20 seconds. If there are no running taps around, use hand sanitiser or alcohol-based hand wipes.



- Your medical scheme will pay for your annual flu vaccine (dependent on scheme rules and benefits).



- Keep your immune system strong. Eat fresh vegetables, fruit, legumes, wholegrains, seeds, nuts, low-fat protein foods and dairy.



- Get enough sleep.



- Quit smoking or don't ever start.

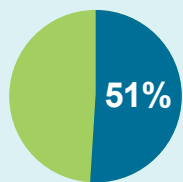
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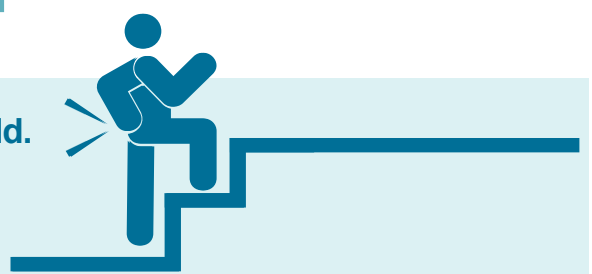
A REAL PAIN IN THE NECK

DEAL WITH BACK AND NECK PAIN WITHOUT PAINKILLERS OR SURGERY

Neck pain affects up to 75% of adults across the world.



Percentage of office workers experiencing lower back pain.



- It limits activities.
- You might lose days at work.
- People are often desperate to get the pain under control.

CAUSES OF BACK AND NECK PAIN



Arthritis, misalignment of the spine (for example from poor posture), being overweight, and muscle tightness or weakness = ongoing, chronic back and neck pain.



The underlying cause will determine the correct treatment.

CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO BACK AND NECK PAIN MANAGEMENT



Doctors now prefer to use a stepped approach to pinpoint the cause of chronic pain by using **movement, exercise and massage**. Medical treatments are used only when necessary.



Biokineticists can create an exercise plan.



Physiotherapists will use manual therapy like massage to ease pain and make movement easier.

Where the above have failed to bring relief, your doctor may recommend medication and/or surgery. It is important to note that there may be complications during and/or after surgery:

- Injury to the nerve or spinal cord.
- Continued pain.
- Wound infection.
- Blood clots.

Pain medication too can cause side-effects. Please address any concerns you may have with your doctor.

Back operations under general anaesthesia can also lead to:

- Confusion and memory loss.
- Breathing problems.
- Changes in blood pressure or heart rhythm.

THE BENEFITS OF STAYING ACTIVE

STAY ACTIVE

"The human body is designed to be used," says the American Chronic Pain Association. "Inactivity can make pain worse over time."



Helps restore flexibility, strength, endurance, function and range of motion.



May reverse some of the nerve changes that can be at the root of the pain.



Has positive effects on the muscle, joints and discs in the back and neck.



Has psychological benefits that may help you perceive the pain differently.

NB: Your pain may restrict certain movements. Work with your doctor and/or physio to slowly incorporate exercise.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO RELIEVE BACK AND NECK PAIN



• For sudden, **acute pain**, rest and apply ice for the first 48 hours and then heat. You can also take anti-inflammatory medication (e.g. ibuprofen). Get professional help for persistent pain.



• Consider swimming, Pilates, tai chi and/or yoga – but check with your doctor first.



• Work on your **posture** – consult a physio for guidance if necessary.



• Find a way to **reduce or cope with stress better** – mindfulness and meditation are useful.



• Use **massage** as a way to provide relief to a stiff back or neck.



• **Avoid lifting heavy objects** if you're experiencing back or neck pain.



• Sleep on a **firm pillow and mattress**.



Consult your member guide or ask your broker about any **conservative back care programme** benefits you may have access to.

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Your 5 diabetes rules over Easter

Enjoy a healthy Easter break with these simple steps.

Many of us take leave and travel over the Easter holidays to enjoy time with friends and family. But the change in routine, environment, diet and activity levels could have an impact on your blood sugar (glucose) levels and weight.

Here are 5 simple rules to help you stick to your diabetes treatment plan this Easter.

1. Go easy on the sweets and treats

One of the factors that determine your blood sugar levels is the amount of glucose that enters your bloodstream after meals. Carb-rich foods like bread, pastries and rusks affect your blood sugar levels as they're broken down into glucose when digested.

Sweet treats tend to be very high in sugar, which means they have a significant impact on your blood sugar levels. An occasional sweet treat isn't a major concern, but it's important not to overindulge. Over time, too much glucose in your bloodstream can cause serious health problems.

Keep foods that contain high amounts of sugar to small servings, and only eat them occasionally.

2. Prepare for social occasions

Food is at the center of many Easter traditions and it can be hard to stick to your normal routine.

The best way to overcome this problem is to prepare: bring a healthy salad for the table, your own unsweetened drinks, and keep healthy snacks handy for when meals are served late. If you indulge in one meal, go easy on the next.

Make a point of swapping high-fat, high-sugar Easter foods with healthier alternatives where possible.

Note the sugar content in your favourite Easter treats. Below you will see that a hot cross bun, a portion of pickled fish and even a milk chocolate-coated marshmallow egg each contain more than 2 teaspoons of sugar per serving (1 teaspoon of sugar = 4.2g)!



Easter treats	kJ	Sugar	Fibre	Fat
1 x hot cross bun	646kJ	8.6g	1.4g	2.0g
100g pickled fish (hake)	570kJ	9g	3.3g	4.3g
1x milk chocolate-coated marshmallow egg (17g)	282kJ	9.1g	0.8g	2.3 g
1x milk chocolate hollow egg (84g)	1902kJ	34.8g	1.2g	27.6g

*Values based on products available at general retail stores.

Keep foods that contain high amounts of sugar to small servings, and only eat them occasionally.

3. Watch your portion sizes

Work with a dietician before the Easter break to regulate your servings of the different food types you're allowed to eat every day. Keep track of how much you're eating by using these rough serving sizes over the holidays (when you may not have access to a food scale):

- A fist size of potatoes, bread, pasta or other starchy carbs.
- A cup of milk.
- A palm size of meat, fish or poultry.
- Two handfuls of vegetables or salad.
- A cupped handful of fruit.
- Top of your thumb size of oil, margarine or butter.

4. Remember to take your medication

When you're out of your routine, chances are you'll forget to take your medication. A little prep can save the day:

- Take your medication with another activity that you won't forget (e.g. brushing your teeth).
- Ask family and friends to remind you to take your medication or test your blood sugar levels.
- Set reminders on your phone or computer or use an alarm clock.

5. Make time to exercise

Being active helps you control your blood sugar levels, and over the holidays, you should have time to fit in exercise.

A few tips:

- Decide the day before on your exercise session, and plan other engagements around this.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes every day. Brisk walks or runs are great when you're not close to the gym or other equipment.
- Try to spend less time sitting still. Do some light chores around the house and, if you're in the company of children, try to go outside and play with them.

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When our children suffer

Take care of your child's mental health from an early age.

Mental health issues are increasing globally, and in South Africa. We often overlook that children too can be affected.

In a small sample group, recent research from Stellenbosch University found that 2.5% of South African school children struggle with mental health disorders.

Factors that cause stress, which can lead to anxiety and depression in kids, includes feeling pressure at school and from peers, as well as hearing and absorbing stressful news from parents (about issues like crime).

If a specific mental disorder like depression runs in your family, there's a higher chance that your child will develop it. But, this doesn't mean that your child is damaged or that it's your fault as the parent.

Depression and general anxiety disorders (GAD)

Child psychologist, Dr Elmarie Du Plessis explains that depression is where people feel a low mood or loss of interest or pleasure most days for at least two weeks. "They have feelings of guilt, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, sleeping difficulties and thoughts about death or suicide."

GAD is defined as: excessive and pervasive worry, accompanied by somatic symptoms (e.g. restlessness, irritability, difficulty concentrating, easily fatigued) that causes significant impairment in social or occupational functioning or marked distress.

Is your child depressed?

Signs to look out for:

1. Numerous physical aches and pains without medical cause.
2. Feelings of sadness or being restless and overactive or even apathetic and inactive.
3. Nightmares, changes in sleeping patterns.
4. Tiredness, changes in eating patterns and weight gain or loss.
5. Deterioration in school performance.
6. Social withdrawal and low self-esteem and even refusing to attend school.

Dr Du Plessis adds: "In addition, in adolescents neglect of their appearance, suicidal thoughts and attempts, self-injury, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, antisocial behaviour, truancy or running away may be further signs of depression."



Ask probing questions beyond just "Why do you feel like this?"

The first line of treatment

Sometimes medication isn't necessary and solutions like psychotherapy can help too. You can also play a role in supporting your child's mental health. It's important to remember though that treating depression takes some trial and error. Be patient throughout the process to make your child feel secure.

First, focus on equipping your child with the ability to express their mood and emotions, advises Dr Du Plessis.

- Have frequent conversations about how to cope with unpleasant and uncomfortable emotions and stressors. Model healthy coping mechanisms with your children.
- A conversation should start from a point of concern. Use examples from media (e.g. Facebook, television programmes and movies) to initiate a conversation.
- Trust your gut if you pick up changes in your child's emotional state and offer support. Get professional assistance if you don't know how to proceed.
- Be patient. Try to resist the urge to fix everything. Overcoming stress will take time. Focus on helping your child, one step at a time.

Getting the language right

Use the correct words, phrases and terminology when talking about mental anxieties and depression. Get into specifics. Ask probing questions beyond just "Why do you feel like this?"

Examples:

- "I'm really worried about you. Can we talk?"
- "I've been noticing that you are (sad/distant/not yourself). I'm really concerned. Can we talk about what's bothering you?"
- "You haven't been acting like yourself lately. Let's talk about what's going on."



If you suspect that your child is depressed or chronically anxious, see a doctor to check if the symptoms are medically or psychologically related. If the symptoms point to mental illness, your doctor may refer you to a psychologist who can diagnose your child properly and provide appropriate treatment.

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