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OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE

YOUR CARE

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2018



Health is the thing that makes you feel that now is the best time of the year.
- Franklin Pierce Adams

Dear Member

The Easter holidays are upon us, and with it comes the temptation to overindulge in chocolate, Easter eggs and many other unhealthy treats. This month, we focus on the ‘sugar traps’ you should avoid to **manage your blood sugar levels** over Easter.

A doctor’s appointment should be a two-way conversation, so it’s best to be prepared. Our **consultation checklist** provides some guidance on the questions you should ask at your next doctor’s visit.

With South Africans consuming up to three times more salt than we are meant to each day, we provide healthy salt replacements you should consider to **lower your salt intake**.

Our last feature looks at back pain, second only to headache as the most common cause of musculoskeletal pain. Did you know there are many ways you can **take care of your back** without relying solely on medication?

Enjoy the read!

POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team



Managing your blood sugar

The Easter holidays are a time for fun and family, but can also tempt you to overindulge. Keep your diabetes in check this Easter by sidestepping the sugar traps!

[Read more ...](#)



Watch your salt intake

South Africans consume much more salt than we are meant to, thereby increasing our risk for hypertension. Lower your salt intake with these healthy swaps.

[Read more ...](#)



Your consultation checklist

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed with a doctor’s visit coming up. Visiting your doctor shouldn’t be a nerve-racking experience, if you are prepared.

[Read more ...](#)

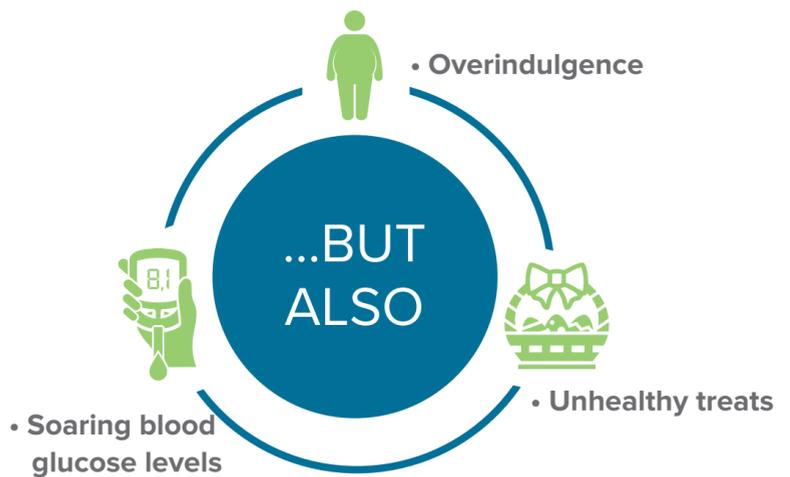
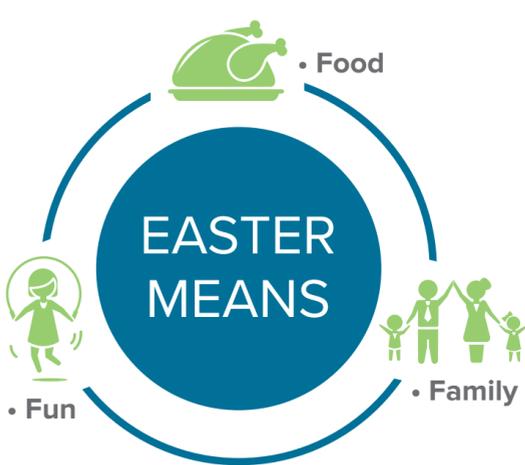


Take care of your back

In line with international guidelines, doctors are relying less on painkillers for treating lower back pain, and now offer non-medicinal alternatives.

[Read more ...](#)

MANAGING YOUR BLOOD SUGAR OVER EASTER



Luckily, you can have your treats, within reason, and keep your health on track with these handy tips!

TIPS!

THE EFFECT OF SUGAR ON A DIABETIC BODY

Over time, high blood glucose levels cause damage to blood vessels and nerves. This leads to complications which include:

- Heart disease
- Strokes
- Kidney and liver damage
- Vision loss
- Pain and the loss of sensation in the lower legs and feet
- Infections and the slow healing of cuts and wounds

As diabetes impairs the ability of the body to process sugar, diabetics need to:

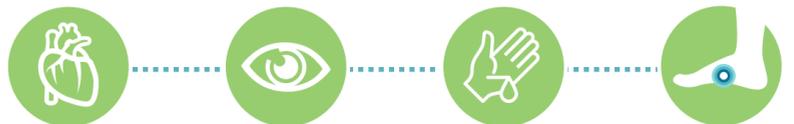
- be extra careful of what and how often they eat
- be aware of the sugar content of different foods
- monitor portion size
- eat foods with fewer carbohydrates
- eat regularly

SIDESTEP THE SUGAR TRAPS



Fizzy drinks, chocolates, Easter eggs and baked foods are packed with sugar. Here's what they cost you in sugar intake:

- 100g Lindt Bunny = 14 teaspoons sugar
- 10g miniature Lindt Bunny = 1½ teaspoons sugar
- 1 marshmallow egg = 1¾ teaspoons sugar
- 1 hot cross bun = 4 teaspoons sugar
- 1 serving of pickled fish = 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 can of cola soft drink = 8 teaspoons sugar



TEST YOURSELF REGULARLY



- **Monitoring your blood glucose levels** is as important as following a balanced diet and taking medication.
- **Set reminders** to ensure you're always on time.

Healthy eating is the cornerstone of diabetes self-management.

FAQs

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:



1. How often should I test my glucose levels?

Consult your doctor first for a treatment and monitoring schedule based on your individual requirements.

• Type 1 diabetes – two readings per day is the minimum:

- Fasting blood glucose (before breakfast)
- Immediately before a meal
- Two hours after a main meal
- Whenever you suspect your blood glucose is low
- For two or more insulin doses per day, blood glucose should be tested three or more times daily

• Type 2 diabetes – one reading per day is the minimum:

- Fasting blood glucose (before breakfast)
- Whenever you suspect your blood glucose is low



2. What's the ideal range for blood glucose?

The normal range is 4-6 mmol/l



3. How do I know if my glucose readings are out of control?

- A fasting (before breakfast) blood glucose reading should be 7 mmol/l or below
- Blood glucose levels two hours after a meal should be below 11 mmol/l



4. What should I do if my sugar levels are too high?

Speak to your doctor to find out how you should adjust your treatment plan. Keep this information on hand at home, or keep it on you when you eat out over the Easter season.



> YOUR CONSULTATION CHECKLIST: BE PREPARED FOR YOUR DOCTOR'S VISIT

It's easy to feel overwhelmed with a doctor's visit coming up. Visiting your doctor shouldn't be a nerve-racking situation, if you are prepared.



A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

A doctor's appointment is a two-way conversation.

- Your contribution will be beneficial for your overall health.
- Good communication is essential when you have a chronic condition, but it's also necessary just for those regular annual check-ups too.
- Before you see your doctor, do some research so that you can voice your concerns.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Don't leave the consultation room without total clarity on your condition or treatment.

Copies of any test results, scans, or medical histories.



DOCUMENTS
TO BRING TO
YOUR DOCTOR'S
VISIT

A list of all the medication you take daily, including over-the-counter and any herbal medications.



TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR VISIT

- Be open and honest with your doctor.
- Share all concerns.
- Don't feel afraid or shy to ask sensitive questions. Remember, the information doesn't leave the room!

YOUR DOCTOR'S VISIT CHECKLIST

Print out the checklist below and tick the questions you'd like to discuss with your doctor at your next visit. You can ask these questions to make sure you get all the guidance you need.



CHECKLIST

1. How long will it take before my treatment starts working?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Can I stop the treatment when I feel better?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I think I may be experiencing side effects from my medication. Do I need to change the medication, or will they go away?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. (Explain your symptoms to your doctor) Is this part of my condition? Is there anything I can do about these problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that exercise could help my condition. Is there any type of exercise that is unsafe for me to do? Do you have any recommendations?	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am having trouble with my diet and/or weight and/or sleep. What do you recommend?	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I have been having trouble managing my other health problems. Can we please discuss my other health concerns?	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Will my alcohol and/or tobacco use affect my treatment?	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I'd like to check up on my general health regularly. When do I need my next general check-up?	<input type="checkbox"/>

DON'T THINK OF A DOCTOR'S VISIT AS A CHORE OR SOMETHING UNPLEASANT



Be prepared, practice beforehand and if necessary take along your checklist. Remember that listening is vital. Ask questions if you don't understand your doctor's jargon. Do it for the good of your health.



Watch your salt intake

Can you imagine heaping three teaspoons of salt directly onto your food? Well, that's what we're doing, when our recommended daily intake is just under a teaspoon.

South Africans take in up to three times more salt each day than we are meant to. This is bad news for your health, says the *Journal of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of South Africa*.

A high salt intake is one of the leading risk factors for hypertension; one of the most common chronic conditions affecting South Africans.

How does salt affect your health?

Salt works on your kidneys to make your body hold more water. The extra water raises your blood pressure and puts strain on your kidneys, arteries in your heart, and brain. This could result in a heart attack or stroke.

Learn how to read labels

Healthy choices start with decoding the ways salt is disguised on labels. Ingredients are listed in order of highest to lowest quantity. The lower down you find salt, the better. If your item lists "Na" or "Sodium", it has salt.

Other names for salt:

- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Brine
- Soy sauce
- Rock salt
- Sea salt
- Sodium bicarbonate
- Sodium nitrate
- Sodium citrate



Healthier salt replacements

- One slice of most types of bread contains 100 to 172 milligrams of sodium. Even just 100g is equal to 20 teaspoons of salt – that's already 19 teaspoons more than you are meant to have.
Healthy swap: Starchy vegetables, rice, legumes and wholegrains.
- Processed meats like sausages, ham, bacon, corned beef and polony contain a high amount of sodium. Pies are often made with processed meat, and packed with salt.
Healthy swap: Opt for fresh fish, chicken and unprocessed cuts of meat.
- Gravy, soup powders, meat extract and stocks are favourites in soups, curries and stews. They typically contain high levels of sodium.
Healthy swap: Replace pre-produced stock cubes and granules with homemade gravies. Or make your own chicken stock by boiling chicken bones with vegetables like carrots, onions and celery. Rather flavour your food with pepper, herbs, spices and lemon juice.
- In breakfast cereals, salt is often masked by the high amount of sugar. Scrutinise those food labels and choose cereals with the lowest sodium value. Choose products that are high in fibre and contain fruit, seeds and nuts.
Healthy swap: Try to replace your daily breakfast cereal with lower-sodium options a few times a week, e.g. scrambled egg, tomato and mushrooms, or a combination of yoghurt, fresh fruit, nuts and flaxseeds. Practise portion control with biscuits and pastries so as not to overindulge in sugar and salt.

In breakfast cereals, salt is often masked by the high amount of sugar

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2. *Heart and Stroke Foundation, SA*
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Take care of your back

Back pain is second only to headache as the most common cause of musculoskeletal pain, as your lower back is the centre of your body.

Persistent back pain shouldn't be ignored – see your doctor sooner rather than later. Early identification of a back problem could help you prevent surgery.

What causes back pain?

The causes are unknown in most cases. “Up to 80% of people might have back pain at some point,” says Pretoria-based physiotherapist, Susan Grobler. “In my opinion, the major cause is a lifestyle of ‘movement poverty’, combined with ‘weekend warrior’ behaviour. As most of us work in office environments, inactivity during the day is common.”

Grobler explains that within a short period, we lose fitness, and replace it with a combination of stiffness and weakness. Sitting for too long, being unfit, overweight and stress are common culprits.

Pop less pills

Doctors are encouraging less reliance on painkillers. There have been recent changes to major international guidelines for treating lower back pain. Where the first-line treatment used to be prescribing medication, doctors will now offer non-medicinal alternatives like yoga, mindfulness and physiotherapy.

Manage the pain without meds

- Excess belly weight puts strain on your spine. Pilates can help strengthen your stabilising muscles and yoga keeps your body flexible. Take the stairs instead of the lift. Park further away at the shops and push your trolley back to the store after loading your car. Get up every hour and move around for a few minutes.
- At your desk, position yourself right in front of your computer so you don't have to twist your neck to see your screen. Consider a stand-up desk. Alternating between sitting and standing is much healthier than just focusing on sitting up straight. When you sit, alternate your sitting postures as well.
- Make sure your mattress and pillow offer good support.
- Sleep on your stomach, advises Grobler. If you're generally inactive, the muscles in front of your body shorten over time, and can lead to back pain. “Ease into it by initially sleeping on your back without a pillow under your head only. Turn around a few weeks later to sleep short periods on your stomach without any pillows.”
- Do functional movements, e.g. stand up and sit on the floor. Repeat. As Grobler explains, “It's about forming a habit to move between sitting and standing without using your arms.”
- Stand on one leg with your eyes closed while talking on the phone to practise posture and balance.
- Try climbing the stairs without firmly holding the rails – but be careful!
- If your budget allows, swimming, jogging and dancing are affordable back-friendly exercises.

When you sit, alternate your sitting postures as well

When to see a doctor

See your doctor if you have back pain that is:

- constant or intense, and worsens at night or when lying down
- not responding to basic treatment or that lasts for more than 4 weeks
- associated with unexplained weight loss, fever, difficulty to initiate urination, loss of sensation or paralysis.

Your doctor might refer you to a physiotherapist or biokineticist (a specialist who is trained to work in health and medicine).



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