



POLMED
OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE

YOUR CARE

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2018



Fall in love with taking care of yourself this February, the month of love...

Dear Member

Welcome to our first POLMED YOUR CARE Newsletter for 2018! We hope you've had a good start to the year.

Awareness of the heart is our focus this month, as it is the month of 'love'. In our main feature, we share the stats and tips on how to protect your heart. Even if you don't have any of the risk factors, it's still important to go for routine screening tests to keep your health numbers within a healthy range.

Also in this edition, we outline the steps to follow to set your **activity goals** ... and achieve them. We shed some light on the most **common cancers in South Africa** and what you can do to reduce your risk. With 12 February marking International Epilepsy Day, we share information on how to cope while **living with epilepsy**.

Enjoy the read!

POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team



Is your heart healthy?

Whether or not you have a heart condition, going for cardiovascular screenings could add years to your life! It's important to know your numbers, as healthy numbers mean a healthy heart.

[Read more ...](#)



Take the fear out of cancer

In South Africa, the most common cancers are breast cancer, lung cancer, cervical cancer, skin cancer and prostate cancer. While cancer can affect anyone, there are many things you can do to reduce your cancer risk.


[Read more ...](#)



Setting activity goals

Being active is an important part of living a healthy lifestyle, but takes careful planning and commitment. Follow these steps on how to set your activity goals ... and achieve them.

[Read more ...](#)



Living with epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that occurs when unusual electrical activity in the brain causes seizures. Read more about seizure safety and what you can do to help yourself or someone else cope with epilepsy.

[Read more ...](#)



> IS YOUR HEART HEALTHY? Heart disease is the number one killer in South Africa



1 in every 5

deaths in South Africa is caused by heart disease and stroke. That's nearly 82 000 lives lost annually, finds the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA).

NB!
TIME FOR CHECK-UP



WHY ARE WE DYING?



• **Heart disease** is among the **top three causes of death** in sub-Saharan Africa.



• South Africans generally have a **high salt intake** which is more than double the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendation.



• **High blood pressure** is the single biggest risk factor. South Africa has one of the highest rates of high blood pressure in the world. About 50% of all strokes are caused by high blood pressure, and strokes are responsible for more than half of all deaths and disabilities related to heart disease.



• **Obesity** also contributes to the escalating rate of heart disease. South Africa has the highest overweight and obesity rate in sub-Saharan Africa.



• **Being overweight or obese** puts extra strain on your heart muscle. It can also **increase your risk of developing diabetes**, which is in itself a risk factor for heart disease.

Protect your ticker

If you've been diagnosed with **high blood pressure, obesity or diabetes**, don't panic. Through regular check-ups, improving your **lifestyle**, and taking your **medication as prescribed**, most of these may be **managed before you have a heart attack or stroke**.

Even if you don't have one of these risk factors, it's still important to go for **routine screening tests** to keep your health numbers (blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, and waist size) within a healthy range. Please note that the tests done are dependent on your condition and the severity thereof.

NB!

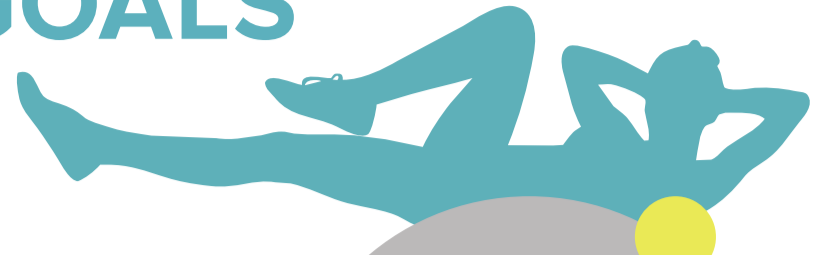
The most important step to take is to go for cardiovascular screenings. Whether you have already been diagnosed with a heart disease or not, knowing your numbers could add years to your life!

Healthy numbers mean a healthy heart



Blood tests (e.g. cholesterol, triglycerides, lipogram)	Some blood tests can measure the levels of fat and cholesterol in your bloodstream and this may help determine your heart disease risk.
Blood pressure monitoring	This test measures the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats, as well as the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart rests between beats. The higher your blood pressure, the higher your risk for heart disease may be.
Echocardiogram	An echocardiogram is an ultrasound of your heart. It uses sound waves to create a picture of your heart. It's used to visualise your heart valves and heart muscle, and can indicate how strongly your heart pumps blood.
Electrocardiogram (ECG)	An ECG records the electrical activity of your heart. This test may be used to check for an irregular heartbeat or heart abnormalities, e.g. to assist in diagnosing a heart attack or to detect if the heart is enlarged as can happen if you have hypertension.
Chest X-ray	A chest X-ray creates images of the structures and organs inside your chest, including your heart, lungs, and large blood vessels. It may help determine the cause of shortness of breath, chest pains, and show signs of heart failure.
Stress test	A stress test assesses how well your heart works when you're resting and physically active. For this test, your doctor may ask you to run on a treadmill or ride a stationary bike for a few minutes. Your body's reaction to stress as your heart rate increases is monitored to help detect heart abnormalities.

SETTING ACTIVITY GOALS and achieving them



We all know that being active is the first, and one of the most important steps, in living a healthy lifestyle. Just like anything else, achieving our activity goals takes careful planning and commitment. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day – be realistic in your goals and rather keep at it than setting your goals too high and then losing interest along the way.

YOUR GOAL HAS TO BE:

- Realistic
- Specific
- Meaningful
- Important to you at that particular time

STEP 1

DEFINE YOUR PERSONAL GOAL



- Losing weight?
- Getting fit?

Having a specific goal keeps you on track!

GOAL PITFALLS



- **Procrastination:** One of the main reasons activity goals fail is the want for immediate results. The key to your goal is to form a good habit that is driven by consistency and commitment.

- **Unrealistic goals:** Aiming too high, too fast can be demoralising and lead to a vicious cycle of lofty ideals and dashed hopes. Make your goal measurable to your physical capability.

STEP 2



CREATE YOUR ACTION PLAN

- What is the healthy change I want to make?
- How much?
- When?
- How often?



Example:

What: I want to walk for exercise.

How much: 15 minutes a day.

When: During lunchtime.

How often: Three times a week.



On a scale from 1-10, rate how likely you think it is that you will achieve the goal (10 being very likely). Make the goal easier if it rates below 5 and make it more challenging if you rate it 9 or 10.



Assess your success weekly and adjust your goal accordingly.

ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND:

1. How will I overcome difficulties?
2. Do I need help and support?
3. How do I hold myself accountable for achieving my targets?

Articulating your goal is not enough. Writing it down forces you to clarify what you want and motivates you to act. Essentially, it feels more real.

STEP 3

STAY MOTIVATED



1. When you feel yourself losing momentum, go back to your action plan and remind yourself why you want to get healthier. Make the list comprehensive and extensive. It's a powerful way to get "re-motivated" instantly.



2. **Don't let others lead you astray.** Stick to your routine as much as possible.



3. **Be prepared to exercise.** If you exercise first thing in the morning, get your clothes out the night before, or have your gym bag packed for the next evening.



4. **Be patient with yourself.** Some days you'll be more motivated or have more time than other days. If you're tired, do less, or something different.



5. **Reward yourself!** Put a few rands in a piggy bank every time you exercise. Then buy yourself something nice with that money at the end of the month. You can use any type of reward that works for you.

ASSESS YOUR SUCCESS

A great way to assess your progress is with an electronic tracker. Support and external input, from friends or family, is also very important. Tell them to regularly ask you about your progress. This is a great way to stay accountable.



Take the fear out of cancer

The word “cancer” can strike immediate fear into anyone’s heart. A new report by the Macmillan Cancer Support Organization in the UK reveals that it’s now more common for a person to be diagnosed with cancer than to get married, have a first child or earn a university degree.

Decoding cancer

Cancer is the umbrella term for different diseases. All cancers involve the abnormal division of cells and the ability to form a tumour or spread cancerous cells to other parts of the body. There are more than 100 types of cancer, each with its own causes, symptoms and treatment.

Carcinomas are formed in the tissues that cover a surface or line internal organs of the body. Examples include breast, prostate, liver, lung and stomach cancer. These account for about 80% of all cancers, of which breast cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute in America, is the most common. South African statistics are similar.

Common cancers in South Africa

- **Breast cancer** is uncontrolled growth of cells in the breast. These cells eventually form a tumour that can be felt as a lump or seen under an X-ray.
- **Lung cancer** is an uncontrollable growth of cells in one or both lungs. These cells interrupt the normal function of lungs and can form a tumour. Cancer can begin through alternation of DNA sequence.
- **Cervical cancer** affects the entrance to the uterus. Cancer of the cervix is most often associated with the human papillomavirus (HPV) which is a common sexually transmitted infection.
- **Skin cancer.** South Africa has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. And, it doesn’t just target the light-skinned (although it’s more common). Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun is the main cause of skin cancer. People who live in areas that get high levels of UV radiation are more likely to get skin cancer.
- **Prostate cancer** originates in the prostate, a tiny organ that’s no bigger than a walnut. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in South African men. When detected early, prostate cancer survival rates are better than 98%.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world

Early warning signs:

- Growths or tumours are often early warning signs and should be checked out immediately. Internal tumours can cause a range of symptoms, including exhaustion and localised pain. This is where regular self-exams at home help. Feel your body regularly for unusual lumps, bumps and other growths.
- If either or both of your parents had cancer, you should be extremely vigilant and screen regularly.
- An unexplained change in how your body functions could also be a warning sign. Sudden headaches, unexplained blood in your stools or localised discomfort in a spot over a few days, and a mole that changes shape or colour, need medical attention.

Cut down on your cancer risk

- A tiny amount of sun exposure is good to boost your Vitamin D levels, but anything more than 10 minutes of unprotected sun exposure a day is risky. Sunblock is non-negotiable. You need sunblock even when the sun’s not out.
- Always practise safe sex and consider getting the HPV vaccine.
- If you smoke, quit. Smoking is a big risk factor for cervical cancer. A Pap smear is your early indicator with this type of cancer. It needs to be done every other year (by a doctor or gynaecologist) and it’s specifically designed to check for early warning signs of cancer. If caught early, survival rates are good.
- Avoid smoking completely, and secondhand smoke. Stay clear of toxic chemical exposure (radon gas and carcinogens). Exercise regularly to improve lung function. It’s also worth overhauling your diet to include more fruit and vegetables, as these are natural sources of vitamins and nutrients.
- Lifestyle changes can reduce your risk. Keep your weight consistent and stay as fit as possible. When it comes to alcohol, less is more. What you eat is also important. A Japanese study found that a plant-based diet could cut the risk of developing breast cancer by 15%. Load your plate with plenty of vegetables, eat very little sugar and stay away from processed foods.



Screen for a longer life

A screening test is an early warning system. Catch the issue early and you can get the problem taken care of sooner and have a better survival rate. Some screening tests are only done on specific high-risk patients, like those who have a high risk of heart disease. Speak to your doctor to check if you need to be screened.

Cancer treatment

There are three main types of treatment.

Chemotherapy	This is a chemical treatment with drugs. Many normal cells are also damaged in this process, and it can cause the patient to feel quite ill for a while but can, and often does, lead to remission of the cancer.
Radiation therapy	External X-rays at high levels are directed towards the tumour with a view to damaging or destroying the cancer cells.
Surgery	This is still the most obvious response, if the tumour is small and limited to a single area of the body.

References

1. <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/882746>
2. <http://www.prevention.com/health/5-most-common-types-of-cancer-in-women/slide/5>
3. http://www.breastcancer.org/symptoms/understand_bc/symptoms
4. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/womens-health/in-depth/breast-cancer-prevention/art-20044676>
5. <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html>
6. https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/screening/index.htm
7. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreatic-cancer/about/what-is-pancreatic-cancer.html>
8. <http://citizen.co.za/news/news-national/1367371/new-study-reveals-three-deadliest-cancers-in-south-africa/>



Living with epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that's characterised by unusual electrical activity in the brain that causes unprovoked seizures. The 12th of February is marked as International Epilepsy Day. It's a special event that promotes the awareness of the condition in more than 120 countries every year.

People with epilepsy have recurring seizures that happen spontaneously and without warning. The common chronic non-communicable brain disorder can affect anyone. According to the World Health Organization, worldwide 80% of people are affected by this disease and are from developed countries.

Epilepsy with a known cause is called secondary epilepsy, or symptomatic epilepsy. The causes could be brain damage from injuries that resulted in a loss of oxygen, or trauma during birth and a low birth weight.

Prevalence of epilepsy in South Africa

Epilepsy is not contagious nor is it a mental illness. According to Epilepsy South Africa, this neurological condition affects one out of 100 people in South Africa.

According to the University of Maryland Medical Centre, seizures are characterised as:

Partial, localised or focal seizures:

A common type that takes place in more than one area in the brain. It may start in one part of the brain and spread to other areas. This type (idiopathic) has no identifiable cause; but could be a result of specific injuries. This seizure can make you hear, feel and see things that aren't there. It's sometimes mistaken for mental illness or another kind of nerve disorder.

Generalised seizures:

This genetically-based seizure normally happens on both sides of the brain. Consciousness is often lost at the onset of the seizure. These can induce muscle spasms, make you black out or fall.

Seizure safety

A seizure can cause real injury and harm. It's vital to take precautions.

People may be vulnerable after a seizure due to loss of consciousness or memory loss. It's important to make them aware of your presence and ensure their safety as they could walk into danger and hurt themselves. It's believed that problems of pneumonia may develop days or hours later after a seizure if liquids or food get into their lungs during a seizure.

What to watch for

Take note of behaviour before the seizure: when the seizure happens, the possible trigger, what happens during the event and what happens after. Your loved one may show signs before a seizure. These signs occur in four phases. Look out for these:

- **Prodrome:** Behaviours or feelings that happen hours and days before the seizure.
- **Aura:** The actual start of the seizure.
- **Ictus:** The seizure episode.
- **Postictal:** The recovery period after seizure.

Your loved one may show signs before a seizure

What to do when someone has a seizure

Always remain calm. You can't stop a seizure, but you can help prevent an injury. The best way to manage seizures is with a practical approach of preparation, prevention and teamwork.

- Turn the person on to the side, to drain any excess saliva. Don't hold them down to prevent shaking.
- To prevent obstruction of the airways, wipe away any excess saliva from their mouth.
- Gently place the person's head on a flat and soft surface to protect it and the neck from banging.
- Move any objects around to prevent injury.

Different types of seizures can start at a young age and some, later in life. Some types last for a short time and other types can last a lifetime. Temporary symptoms occur, like loss of awareness or consciousness, and disturbances of movement, sensation (including vision, hearing and taste), mood, or other cognitive functions.

Help yourself

Diet: Eat a balanced diet that's made up of carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vegetables and fruit, and drink plenty of fluids.

Keep active: Exercise releases feel-good hormones into the brain. It also helps keep your muscles active and increases oxygen flow to your brain.

Therapy like homeopathy, herbal remedies, massage, aromatherapy and acupuncture can help to promote wellbeing. These can reduce stress and may be used alongside anti-epileptic drugs.

Support: Find ways of understanding, coping or feeling more in control about living with epilepsy. You can do this through a support group, health line, family or friends.

References:

1. <https://epilepsy.org/about-epilepsy/>
2. http://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/epilepsy/en/
3. <http://www.health24.com/Medical/Epilepsy/About-epilepsy/Epilepsy-affects-over-500-000-South-Africans-20150615>
4. <http://www.umm.edu/health/medical/reports/articles/epilepsy>
5. <https://www.webmd.com/epilepsy/types-of-seizures-their-symptoms#1>