



POLMED[®]

OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE

YOUR CARE

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2017



Take care of your body and it will take care of you

Dear Member

Welcome to the July edition of the POLMED YOUR CARE Newsletter. We hope you're well on your way to a healthier you!

Our features this month:

- Insulin and glucagon are hormones that work together to help regulate the levels of blood glucose (sugar) in your body. We look at what you can do to prevent your blood sugar levels from dropping too low.
- Some asthma triggers change with the seasons – and thus also your risk of an asthma attack. It may not be possible to avoid these triggers completely, but there are ways to minimise exposure.
- Do you feel helpless and unable to support your loved one with a mental illness? We provide some guidance on how to cope.
- Medical studies have proven that smoking is a total onslaught to your body. If you're still lighting up, read our 'Up in smoke' article to find out how smoking affects each part of your body.

Stay informed and happy reading!

POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team



Lowdown on insulin and glucagon

Insulin and glucagon work together to balance your blood sugar levels. These hormones are like the yin and yang of blood glucose maintenance.

[Read more ...](#)



Help yourself, help your loved one

When supporting a loved one with a mental illness, the first step is to learn as much as you can about the problem.

[Read more ...](#)



The four seasons of asthma

Just as allergies may increase during seasonal changes, so too can the occurrence of asthma attacks.

[Read more ...](#)

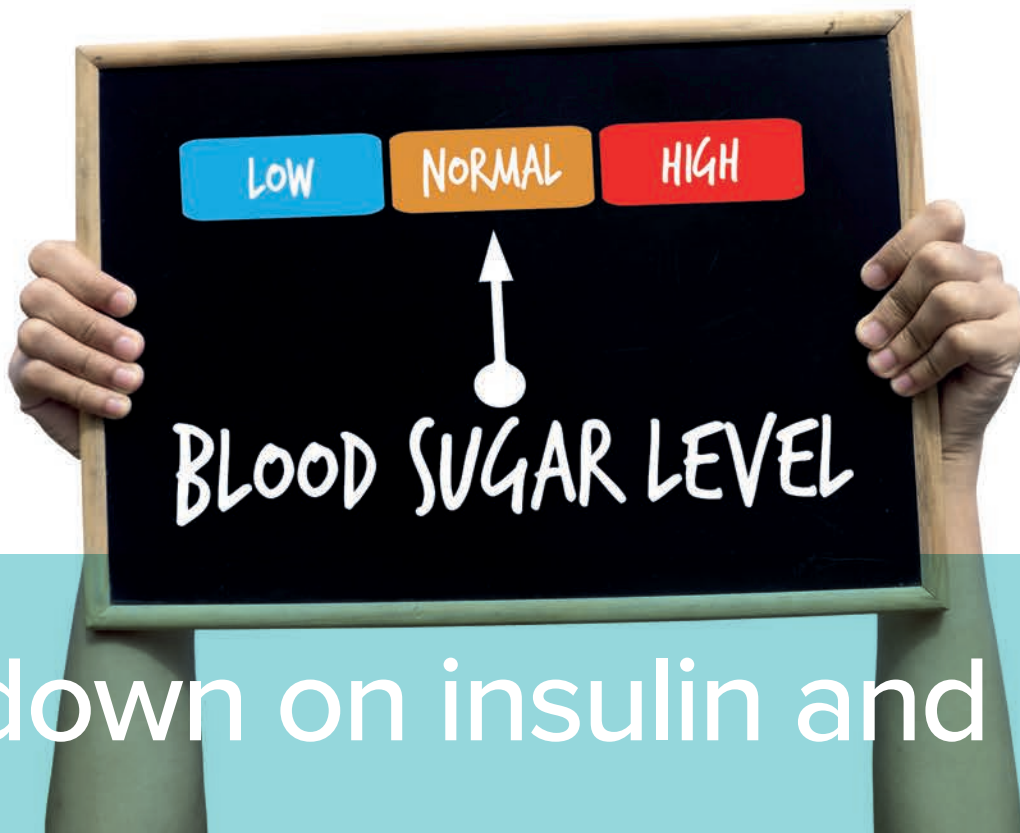


Up in smoke

We are all aware of some of the health risks associated with smoking. But infertility? Impotence? Tooth loss? Blindness?

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If you have any questions or need more information, please call POLMED on 0860 765 633 (select the option for the Disease Management Programme), or send an email to polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za with your membership number and contact details.



The lowdown on insulin and glucagon

Yin and yang hormones

Think of insulin and glucagon as a team that helps regulate levels of blood sugar (glucose) in your body. Glucose forms part of the food you eat and fuels your body. When you eat, your pancreas releases insulin to help lower blood sugar. Between meals, your pancreas releases glucagon to increase blood sugar.

After a meal, the amount of glucose in the bloodstream rises and this sends a signal to the pancreas to produce more insulin. The insulin tells cells throughout your body to take in glucose from your bloodstream. As the glucose moves into your cells, your blood glucose levels go down. Some cells use the glucose as energy. Other cells, such as in your liver and muscles, store any excess glucose as a substance called glycogen. When blood glucose levels are low, glucagon is released and signals the liver to release glucose into the blood. Your body uses glycogen for fuel between meals.

Your body uses glycogen for fuel between meals

If you have diabetes, either your body can't use the insulin you make properly, doesn't produce enough insulin or doesn't produce insulin at all. In turn, this may result in too much or too little glucagon being released into the bloodstream.

Boost low blood sugar:

- If your next meal is more than an hour away, eat one carbohydrate snack to keep your blood glucose from decreasing.
- Always carry something with you to treat an insulin reaction such as glucose sachets or glucose tablets (consult your doctor).
- Monitor your blood sugar levels and use the 15/15 rule. Eat at least 15 grams of carbs when your sugar is low, then wait 15 minutes and check if it has levelled.
- Don't skip meals, because you risk having your blood sugar dropping too low if you skip or delay meals.
- Exercise 30 minutes to one hour after meals. Check your sugars before and after exercise, and discuss with your doctor what types of changes can be made.



Snack on this:

- Try plain water infused with fruit, tea with cinnamon sticks, apple juice, energy drinks in small amounts, and homemade chocolate milk or hot chocolate (use dark chocolate).
- Legumes like dried beans, peas and lentils. You can even enjoy a black bean and corn salsa with your raw vegetables.
- Think Greek yoghurt, cottage cheese, eggs, and lean meats. Low fat cheese sticks and celery sticks with peanut butter also helps.

Hypoglycaemia (very low blood sugar)

- When your blood sugar levels are too low, eat something with carbohydrates to keep you going.
- Dried fruits such as prunes and raisins are good. For something sweeter, opt for a few blocks of dark chocolate.
- For a quick sugar fix try an energy bar, a banana or a glass of milk.

References:

1. <http://www.diabeticlivingonline.com/monitoring/blood-sugar/13-diabetes-tips-to-improve-blood-sugar-control?page=14>
2. <http://www.healthline.com/health/diabetes/insulin-and-glucagon#Introduction1>
3. <http://www.richteralternativemed.com/diabetes-7-foods-control-blood-sugar/>
4. <https://www.diabetesdaily.com/learn-about-diabetes/diabetes-complications/low-blood-sugar-hypoglycemia/>



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The four seasons of asthma

Some asthma triggers change with the seasons – and thus also your risk of an asthma attack.

Approximately 75% of people with asthma also suffer from allergies. Just as allergies may increase during seasonal changes, so too can the occurrence of asthma attacks.

There are a number of triggers which, if avoided, can reduce the risk of developing an asthma attack. Common asthma triggers include animals, dust, changes in weather, chemicals in the air or food, exercise, mould, pollen, respiratory infections such as the common cold, strong emotions, and tobacco smoke. Aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs can also provoke asthma in some patients.

Prevalence fluctuates seasonally

The prevalence of these triggers may increase or decrease seasonally and, although it's not possible to completely avoid these environmental triggers, there are ways to minimise exposure in the home, school, work, recreation and travel environments.

As the seasons move from summer into autumn, the drop in temperature in the mornings and evenings may trigger attacks for some asthmatics. There are also a number of outdoor moulds that thrive in the damp environment created by falling and decaying leaves, which asthmatics should be mindful of.



The winter months are particularly hazardous for asthma sufferers due to the cold temperatures and an increase in smog from fires. For those asthma sufferers whose attacks are triggered by cold, it is important to recognise the early warning signs.

Warning signs of an asthma attack include frequent coughing, especially at night; shortness of breath; feeling fatigued and irritable; feeling tired or weak when exercising; wheezing or coughing after exercise; decreases in lung function as measured on a peak flow meter; signs of a cold or allergies; and trouble sleeping.

Although these symptoms may not be severe enough to stop you from going about your daily activities, they must be recognised as a warning that you could be at risk of a serious attack, as treating even mild symptoms can assist in preventing severe episodes.

It is worth noting that not every person with asthma has the same symptoms and while some asthmatics may go for extended periods without having any symptoms, others may have asthma symptoms every day.

Take action to prevent a serious asthma attack

Regardless of the season, taking your asthma medication as prescribed by your doctor is very important, as is implementing healthier lifestyle choices such as opting to quit smoking. If you experience warning signs and your usual medication is not helping, consult your doctor.

Following the management plan best suited to you (as discussed with your doctor) can dramatically improve your quality of life. It is important for you to monitor your symptoms to detect the onset of an asthma attack before it gets too bad, and to avoid triggers, seasonal or not, where you can.



Adapted from:

<http://www.health24.com/Medical/Asthma/Manage-your-asthma/The-four-seasons-of-Asthma-20120721>

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Help yourself, help your loved one

It is difficult supporting a loved one with a mental illness, but there are ways to cope.

Do you find yourself feeling helpless and unable to support your loved one with a mental illness? The first step is to learn as much as you can about the problem.

A person's mental health becomes a mental illness when ongoing symptoms cause frequent stress and affect their ability to function. This can be seen in changes in behaviour, emotional stability and moods. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviours.

Symptoms include:

- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows.
- Withdrawal from friends and activities.
- Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping.
- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations.
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence.

Support your loved one

1. Learn

Learning about your loved one's illness is the foundation of support. Families who are involved in the treatment process are more equipped to shoulder the emotional burden. Not knowing how the illness functions can prevent you from giving your loved ones effective help. For instance, without education, it's hard for people to understand the severity of the symptoms, such as the terrifying thoughts associated with schizophrenia, or the suicidal ones associated with depression.

2. Be realistic

Your expectations can impact your loved one's recovery, too. Instead of having high expectations, rather encourage a loved one to set a slower pace, as added stressors can make symptoms worse. For example, being patient and cautiously optimistic when it comes to new kinds of treatment.

Learning about the illness is the foundation of support



3. Reach for support

Through support, you can gain more strength and valuable knowledge to help your loved one. Being around people who are experiencing similar things to you will make you feel less alone. Your loved one could also join a support group. Try the South African Depression and Anxiety Group for 24-hour support. Contact 0800 12 13 14.

4. Stay calm

Remember, your actions can influence your loved one and affect their symptoms. Avoid responding negatively during their difficult moods. If you feel yourself getting frustrated, take a deep breath and take a break for a few minutes.

5. Let your loved one have control

People with mental illness feel they've lost control of their lives and they suffer the most with self-esteem. Treat them with respect and allow them to make decisions. It is also important to discuss changes that need to be made instead of just enforcing them.

3 ways to improve mood

- Colour affects your mood and can lift it when needed. Decorate your home or your loved one's room with calming colours of their choice such as: soft blues, bright yellows and soft shades of pink.
- Art has been proven to enhance and balance moods by providing a distraction from negative emotions. When you or your loved one are in need of a break, try an adult colouring book.
- Light has also been proven to improve moods. Take walks in the morning with your loved one or on your own to start off your day feeling great.

References:

1. <http://psychcentral.com/lib/15-ways-to-support-a-loved-one-with-serious-mental-illness/2/>
2. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/basics/definition/con-20033813>
3. <http://www.sadag.org/>
4. <http://www.colour-affects.co.uk/psychological-properties-of-colours>
5. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/minding-the-body/201609/drawing-is-simple-powerful-way-improve-your-mood>



Up in smoke

We all know that smoking increases the risk of lung cancer and heart attack. But impotence? Tooth loss? Abnormal fat deposits? Blindness?

With each new medical study, it becomes more apparent that smoking is a total onslaught on your body. Smoking harms every tissue in the body, yet people are still lighting up.

How smoking harms your body

Brain

- Smoking doubles your risk for **stroke**.
- Smoking has been implicated in **degeneration of mental function**.

Skin

- Smoking typically results in **premature skin ageing**. This is especially noticeable on your face as wrinkles form early on.
- Smokers have a two to three times greater risk of developing the chronic skin condition, **psoriasis**.

Eyes

- Smoking increases your risk for **blindness** due to age-related macular degeneration by up to four times.

Mouth

- A smoker's risk of developing **oral (mouth) cancer** is four times that of a non-smoker.
- Smoking increases the risk for **gum disease**, which is associated with **tooth loss** and **halitosis** (bad breath).
- Smokers usually have a **poor sense of taste**.



ENT (ears, nose and throat)

- Children exposed to passive smoke tend to have more **middle ear infections**.
- Smoking has been linked to **cancer of the nasal cavities and sinuses**.
- Smoking increases your risk for **cancer of the pharynx (throat)** and **cancer of the larynx (voice box)**.
- Smoking can damage the lining of the voice box, and a hoarse, gravelly voice is common in smokers.

Oesophagus

- Smoking increases your risk for **cancer of the oesophagus** (swallowing pipe/gullet).

Lungs

- One in 10 moderate smokers and almost one in five heavy smokers will die of **lung cancer**.
- Smoking is a major risk factor for **COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)**, which includes such conditions as **emphysema** and **chronic bronchitis**.
- Smoking worsens **asthma** symptoms and renders asthma medication less effective.

Major organs

- Smoking increases your risk for **heart disease** and **heart attack** by two to three times.
- Smoking increases your risk for **cancer of the kidney, pancreas, liver, stomach and bladder**.
- Smoking increases the risk for **colorectal cancer**.

Reproductive organs

- Smoking may be the cause of **infertility** in 17% of couples who are childless for medical reasons.
- Smoking increases the risk of **impotence**, or erectile dysfunction, by about 50% for men in their 30s and 40s.
- Smoking increases the risk of **cervical cancer**.
- Smoking more than 10 cigarettes a day increases the risk of **early menopause** to twice that of non-smokers.

Smoking increases your risk for kidney cancer

Pregnancy and childbirth

- Smoking increases the risk for problems during pregnancy and birth, including **miscarriage**, and babies who are born **premature, underweight or stillborn**.
- Passive smoking is believed to be a causative factor in **SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome)**.

Limbs

- Smoking is the most important risk factor for **peripheral vascular disease** (narrowing of arteries to the limbs), and increases the risk of **gangrene** and subsequent limb amputation by over five times.

Bones and muscles

- Smoking **weakens bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments**.
- **Osteoporosis** (a condition which causes bones to become weak and brittle) tends to occur earlier in smokers.
- Smoking is associated with **slow healing of fractures** and **slow wound healing** – with a higher chance of complications from poor wound healing after surgery.

Blood

- Smoking is a risk factor for certain kinds of **leukaemia**.

Immune system

- Risk of **infections, like colds and flu**, is higher in smokers.
- Children exposed to passive smoking are at increased risk for **bronchitis, pneumonia, throat infections** and **middle ear infections**.

Endocrine (hormone) system

- The effect of smoking on the endocrine system (glands which secrete hormones) can result in the **abnormal distribution of body fat**.

Reference:

<http://www.health24.com/Lifestyle/Stop-smoking/How-smoking-affects-your-health/Smoking-and-your-body-a-total-onslaught-20120721>

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