



**POLMED**<sup>®</sup>

OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE

# YOUR CARE

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2018



'Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all.'

- Bill Clinton

Dear Member

**July is Mental Health Awareness Month.** Whether you have a mental health condition or not, it is important to know which situations, experiences and issues can make you vulnerable to mental illness. Since early diagnosis is key, our main feature highlights the common symptoms to look out for, and advises how you can start looking after your mental wellbeing.

Also featured this month:

- We explain how regular HbA1c testing can help you to **keep your diabetes under control.**
- Our **'Know your numbers'** article aims to help you better understand and record annual tests you may need to monitor your health.
- Our final feature looks at the **real benefits of exercise** – regular exercise can help manage and prevent many chronic conditions related to unhealthy lifestyles.

Enjoy the read!

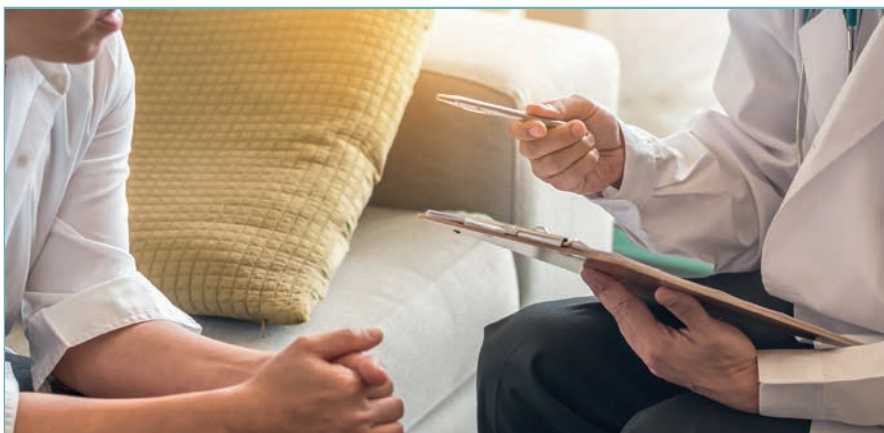
**POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team**



## On the mind

We all feel down or depressed from time to time, but when ongoing symptoms affect your ability to function normally, it's time to get help. Read more to find out if you could be vulnerable to mental illness.

[Read more ...](#)



## Get checked – know your numbers

A balanced diet and being physically active are not the only ways to keep your chronic condition in check. Some conditions have to be constantly monitored, and others require multiple tests per year.

[Read more ...](#)



## Keep your diabetes in check

Keep your diabetes under control with a simple blood test – the HbA1c test. This test allows your doctor to get a clearer picture of your average blood glucose levels over the past two to three months.

[Read more ...](#)



## Benefits of exercise

'Exercise is medicine'. We've all heard this phrase, but many of us don't understand the extent of its meaning. In a nutshell: If you suffer from chronic conditions, the more you move, the better your health!

[Read more ...](#)

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](mailto:polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za) with your membership number and contact details.

## ON THE MIND: KNOWING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH STATUS WILL PREVENT FUTURE PROBLEMS

Mental illness is a condition that makes it frequently difficult for you to function normally. Due to this, it can cause problems in your daily life, making you struggle with school, work and even your relationships.



### THE FACTS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS



1. Mental illness refers to a variety of different conditions that affect your mood, thinking and behaviour.



2. Mental illness includes depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive disorders.



3. Mental illness usually develops later in life, but it can begin at any age.

### A REPRESENTATIVE STUDY IN SOUTH AFRICA FOUND THAT:



- **30.3% of adults** will have suffered from some form of mental disorder in their lifetime.
- Globally, an estimated **400 million people** suffer from mental illness.
- **One in five adults** are diagnosed with a mental illness in any given year.



### WHAT MAKES YOU VULNERABLE TO MENTAL ILLNESS?



Certain social situations, experiences and issues can increase the risk of developing a mental illness. Although mental illness can develop in anyone, certain groups are more at risk than others, including:

- minority ethnic groups
- refugees and asylum seekers
- people with learning disabilities and physical health problems
- people from the **LGBTI community** (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people)



Always remember that **early identification, accurate diagnosis and effective treatment** are key in helping you cope with mental illnesses.

### EARLY DIAGNOSIS OF MENTAL ILLNESS IS ESSENTIAL



- An early diagnosis can lead to early treatment, which can keep the illness from getting worse or lasting a long time.
- An early diagnosis can also prevent the risk of social isolation, which is a trigger for mental illness and worsens the symptoms.

### COMMON SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL ILLNESS TO LOOK OUT FOR:



- Appetite changes, either weight loss or weight gain.



- Feelings of excessive or inappropriate guilt.



- Sleeping too much or too little.



- Difficulty concentrating or being indecisive.



- Loss of energy or fatigue.



- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.



- Slowing or speeding up of physical activity.

*\*You should consult your doctor immediately if you are experiencing these symptoms.*

You can start taking care of your mental wellbeing right now. Take a few minutes to answer these questions as honestly as possible:

### WHEN YOU FEEL DEPRESSED OR DOWN:

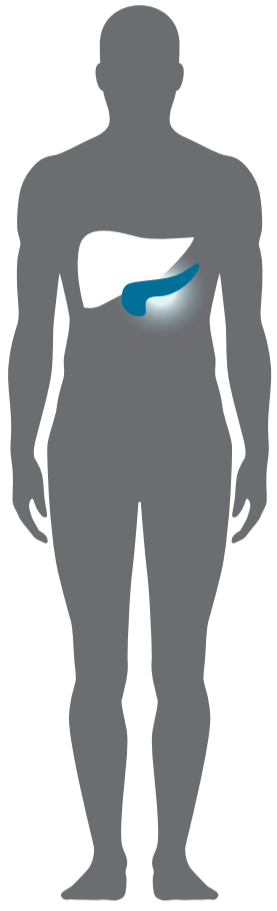
- Do you eat more or less than usual?
- Do you struggle to fall asleep?
- Do you have little energy and often feel tired?
- Do you have low self-esteem?
- Do you struggle to concentrate?
- Do you find it difficult to make decisions?
- Do you feel hopeless and demotivated?



*If you've answered 'yes' to more than three of these questions, speak to your doctor about your low mood. Your doctor will be able to assess your feelings and find a way of treating your condition, so you can get back to having a good quality of life.*



## ➤ KEEP YOUR DIABETES IN CHECK: REGULAR HbA1c TESTING WILL HELP YOU CONTROL YOUR DIABETES



### HOW DIABETES AFFECTS YOU

Diabetes is a disease that impairs your body's ability to produce or respond to the hormone – insulin. A person with diabetes has increased levels of glucose sugar in the blood and an abnormal metabolism.

#### FACTORS THAT CAUSE BLOOD SUGAR TO INCREASE:

- being inactive
- high levels of stress
- menstrual periods
- dehydration
- too much food with carbs
- low levels of insulin

#### FACTORS THAT CAUSE BLOOD SUGAR TO DECREASE:

- doing more exercise than usual
- missing meals
- too much insulin in the body
- alcohol on an empty stomach
- side effects from medication

But you can keep your diabetes under control with one simple test – the HbA1c test.



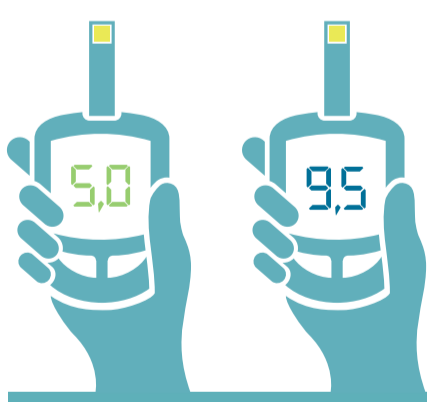
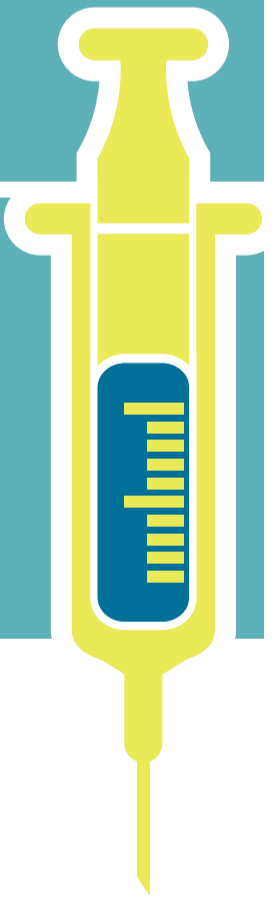
### WHAT IS THE HbA1c TEST:

The HbA1c test allows your doctor to get a clearer picture of your average blood sugar levels for a certain period. The higher your levels are, the greater your risk of developing diabetes-related complications.



### HOW THE HbA1c TEST WORKS

- The HbA1c test is done by taking blood from a finger or a blood sample from your arm.
- The blood glucose level is then tested using this blood.
- The results from the HbA1c test are used as an average of the blood glucose levels in your body for two to three months.



### WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN:

- Anything between 4% and 5.6% – normal levels.
- Levels of 5.7% to 6.4% – high risk of getting diabetes (pre-diabetes).
- Higher than 7% – you have diabetes or your diabetes is not well controlled.

## It is recommended that diabetics should go for a HbA1c test every six months.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Regular glucose testing can help your doctor assess how well your diabetes is managed.



### GOOD TO KNOW:

Exercise in moderation helps increase the amount of insulin your body produces and burns extra glucose in your bloodstream.





## Get checked - know your numbers

Eating a balanced diet and being physically active are not the only ways to keep your chronic condition in check. The last screening or testing you had prior to your diagnosis should not be the only one. Chronic conditions have to be constantly monitored and other conditions need multiple tests per year.

Chronic diseases include diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), asthma, rheumatic diseases, and cancer.

If you have a chronic condition for which you take prescribed medication, you need to be seen by your doctor more than once a year.

### Get checked

The mainstay of prevention and treatment for most chronic diseases is a healthy lifestyle. This takes the form of a nourishing diet, regular exercise, avoiding smoking and drinking alcohol, and getting good rest.

The follow-up of chronic diseases may occur spontaneously in response to a side effect of medication or due to an acute illness or exacerbation of the chronic disease. It is essential to attend follow-up visits to assess whether your medication is still working for you. This will help you compare your results and track your progress.

According to the Harvard Medical School, you should listen to your body and track its changes. If you have hypertension, learn to check your blood pressure. If your heart has rhythm problems, check your pulse. For heart failure, weigh yourself every day and keep track of your symptoms. Monitoring these signs can help you spot potentially harmful changes in your body.

After seeing your doctor and before you leave the consultation room, ask when you should visit again for a follow-up or new check-up. Pay attention to changes in your body, and mention new family history, environmental factors and relevant life circumstances on your next visit.



### Know your numbers

Use the table below to better understand and record annual tests you may need to monitor your health.

Conditions	Test	What does it test?	How is it tested?	Normal range	Previous results	Current results
<b>Diabetes</b>	HbA1c	Your average levels of blood glucose over the past 3 months.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood drawn from a vein. This is done at a lab.</li> <li>Finger prick.</li> </ol>	Less than 7%		
<b>Hypertension (high blood pressure)</b>	A pressure cuff (sphygmomanometer)	The top number/numerator (systolic) indicates how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls when the heart beats. The bottom number/denominator (diastolic) indicates how much pressure your blood is exerting against your artery walls while the heart is resting between beats.	<p>The cuff is placed around the upper arm before being manually or electronically inflated.</p> <p>When it's inflated, the cuff compresses the brachial artery, briefly stopping blood flow.</p> <p>The air in the cuff is slowly released while the nurse listens with a stethoscope or monitors an electronic readout.</p>	Less than 120/80 mm Hg)		
<b>High cholesterol</b>	Finger prick test or blood sample taken from a vein in your arm.	Tests different types of cholesterol in the body including total cholesterol.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood drawn from a vein. This is done at a lab.</li> <li>Finger prick.</li> </ol>	Less than 200 mg/dL		
<b>General health</b>	An examination of your current state of health to ensure that there aren't any underlying problems.	May include a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>height check</li> <li>weight measurement</li> <li>throat and neck exam</li> <li>ear exam</li> <li>lungs and heart check</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Height and weight is measured with a tape measure and a scale.</li> <li>A tool called an otoscope is used to check your ears for abnormalities.</li> <li>A stethoscope is used to check the sound of your heartbeat and your lungs.</li> <li>The doctor would gently press your neck to check for any swelling.</li> </ul>	N/A		
<b>Waist-to-hip ratio (WHR)</b>	The ratio of your hip circumference to your waist circumference.	A measurement of obesity that looks at the proportion of fat stored on your waist, hips and buttocks.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You'll be told to stand up straight and breathe out.</li> <li>The doctor will measure the distance around the largest part of your hips (the widest part of your buttocks).</li> <li>Your WHR will be calculated by dividing your waist circumference by your hip circumference.</li> </ol>	0.9 or less in men and 0.85 or less in women.		

#### References:

- <https://health.usnews.com/health-news/patient-advice/articles/how-often-should-you-see-the-doctor>
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/10-steps-for-coping-with-a-chronic-condition>
- <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes/overview/tests-diagnosis>
- <http://www.heartfoundation.co.za/treating-a-stroke/>
- <https://www.saebo.com/nih-stroke-scale-nihss/>



## The real benefits of exercise

Along with a healthy diet and medication, exercise may help manage your chronic condition.

“Exercise is medicine”. We’ve all heard this phrase, but many of us don’t understand the extent of its meaning.

Medical breakthroughs have improved life expectancy statistics in the last few decades, but it seems that exercise may be the key to thriving in later life.

In a nutshell, the more you move, the better your health! If you suffer from chronic conditions, exercise can help ease the symptoms and lower the risk of other chronic conditions.

As part of the quadruple burden of disease, South Africa is faced with a growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This is predominantly as a result of chronic diseases related to unhealthy lifestyles. Research has shown that regular exercise can help manage and prevent many of these.

### How does exercise help with chronic conditions?

According to South African biokineticist David Fabricius, exercise helps to:

- Significantly improve overall health.
- Reduce the risk of heart disease by 40%.
- Lower the risk of stroke by 27%.
- Reduce the risk of high blood pressure by almost 50%.
- Reduce the risk of diabetes by almost 50%.
- Reduce mortality and the risk of recurrent breast cancer by almost 50%.
- Lower the risk of colon cancer by over 60%.
- Reduce hip fractures by 60%.
- Reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease by one-third.
- Decrease depression as effectively as medication or behavioural therapy.

In a nutshell, the more you move, the better your health!

### How does it work?

#### Heart health

Research has shown that regular exercise lowers blood pressure, makes your heart more efficient at pumping blood around your body and increasing your levels of good cholesterol. All this helps with heart processes and health.

**Do:** Running, jogging and biking to raise your heart rate. Include stretching and strength exercises with weights or resistance bands. Your heart is a muscle and these exercises will help strengthen it.

#### Diabetes

Exercise helps regulate insulin, making it more effective in lowering your blood sugar level.

**Do:** Aerobic exercises and strength-training exercises. Dancing, brisk walking and swimming are good aerobic options. For strength training, lift weights or use your own body in exercises like squats, lunges and sit-ups.

#### Asthma

Some exercises help improve the muscles you use for breathing, and can help control the frequency and severity of asthma symptoms.

**Do:** Low-impact exercises which will build and strengthen your breathing muscles like swimming, biking and walking.

#### Arthritis

Reduce body pain, maintain muscle strength and lessen stiffness in your joints by exercising regularly.

**Do:** Cycling and walking to help loosen stiff joints and build bone strength.

#### Back pain

Regular low-impact aerobic exercises can increase strength and endurance in your back, and improve muscle function. Abdominal and back exercises can also ease symptoms of back pain by strengthening the muscles along your spine.

**Do:** Aerobic exercises like walking and cycling, along with abdominal and back exercises like planking and crunches.



### Good to know:

- Talk to your doctor before starting any exercises and figure out which plan would work best for your condition.
- If you aren’t usually active, start with 10 to 15 minutes of light exercise and build your endurance.
- Exercise can help with certain conditions, but don’t stop your medication unless your doctor says so!
- Biokineticist, Loreen Winton, recommends simple changes like taking the stairs, parking further away and spending more time outdoors.

#### References:

1. David Fabricius, Biokineticist, South Africa
2. Loreen Winton, Biokineticist, South Africa
3. <https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/guide/exercise-healthy-heart#1>