



Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love
- Hamilton Wright Mabee

Dear Member

The holidays are fast approaching. And if you suffer from a chronic condition, the holiday period can bring extra challenges that can negatively affect your health. **Remember: moderation is the key.**

Moderation does not only apply to eating. Attending multiple holiday events can be exhausting, especially since you still need to adhere to your medication and treatment plan. It can also lead to undue stress, so choose events that are easy for you to manage and attend. Overdoing it can cause a chronic condition to flare up, so be reasonable when planning your holiday schedule.

Our main feature this month:

Regular medical check-ups are an important part of maintaining good health. If you have a chronic illness, you should be following up with your doctor at least once a year – or more frequently, depending on your condition(s). We explain why it's necessary to attend your scheduled check-ups, and how you can prepare to get the most out of your visit.

Also in this edition:

- We highlight the importance of **keeping your heart in peak condition.**
- We provide you with **weight loss tips** that don't include giving up those beloved carbs.
- Finally, we profile the pitfalls to avoid when **navigating the festive season.**

Stay informed and enjoy the holidays! Till next year ...

POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team



Health in check

Do you dread your annual medical check-up? Even though it may be uncomfortable, the pricking and prodding is more important than you realise.

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Lose weight WITH carbs

Are you avoiding carbs altogether? Research shows that there are some good carbs that can help with weight loss – and many dieticians agree.

[Read more ...](#)



Take care of your ticker

Your heart has the important job of keeping you alive. Keep your heart healthy with good nutrition, moderate exercise ... and taking time out to unwind.

[Read more ...](#)



10 festive season traps

The holiday season looms and all you want to do is relax – but that's not always easy. Get the most out of your break by avoiding these festive season stressors.

[Read more ...](#)



Health in check

Could a simple health screening save your life? Absolutely!

Do you dread your medical check-up? Even though it may be uncomfortable, the pricking and prodding is more important than you realise. **If you have a chronic illness, you should be following up with your doctor at least once a year (possibly more frequently, depending on how many illnesses you have, and their severity).**

Why is it necessary to have regular check-ups?

1. It can help pinpoint problems before they become serious. The earlier a health issue is detected, the better your chance for successful treatment.
2. It is a way of reassuring yourself that you are as healthy as you feel. Often, the signs and symptoms of some conditions are 'silent'. Knowing your health status can put your mind at ease. This is especially important if you are at risk for diabetes or hypertension.
3. It can empower you to make your health and wellness a priority, and help you make better lifestyle choices. This is a step towards living a long and healthy life.
4. It can help you develop a connection with your doctor. This is important in case of a health crisis or emergency. Your doctor will already know your medical history and could possibly see to you sooner.
5. It may reduce your healthcare costs in the long run.

What to bring

Before your regular check-up, you should prepare yourself by bringing along the following:

- A list of all the current medications (and their dosages) you are taking. Include over-the-counter ones.
- A record of any symptoms you are experiencing. It may be useful to track the variability and severity of your symptoms in a diary to show your doctor.
- A record of the doctors you have seen (along with their contact details), and details of any treatment they may put you on.
- The results of any tests you may have done recently, e.g. blood tests, X-rays, blood pressure or blood sugar readings.
- A trusted friend/relative. If someone is closely involved in your medical care, it would be useful if they could accompany you should your doctor need any information from them, or need to involve them in any changes to your medical care.

Track the severity of your symptoms in a diary

What to expect

At your check-up, your doctor will ask questions about your medical history and perform an examination. Afterwards, certain tests may be necessary. During your visit, it is important that you give your doctor as much information as possible. Also use the opportunity to ask any questions about your health that you may have prepared before the appointment, or as they occur to you.

Some useful questions to ask your doctor

- **Is my weight within the healthy range?**
It's important to check your weight frequently and it would be useful to know other measurements such as your waist circumference and waist-to-hip ratio. Your body weight may be a reflection of your general health status, so ask your doctor how you can maintain or reach a healthy weight.
- **Is my blood pressure in the healthy range?**
High blood pressure can put you at an increased risk for heart disease, kidney disease and stroke. Ask your doctor about any lifestyle or medication changes you may need to apply.
- **Are the medications I'm taking still relevant?**
Your body changes all the time, so sometimes, certain medications won't work for you anymore, or their dose may need adjusting. Be sure to ask about over-the-counter supplements that you are on, or are considering.
- **Considering my family history, am I at risk for certain diseases?**
Get clued up on any illnesses that may run in your family. Ask your doctor about early warning signs, and how you can lower your risk.
- **Considering my age and gender, do you recommend any routine screenings?**
It is important to check what you may be at risk for, the possible tests that can screen for these conditions, and the necessary preventative measures.
- **Considering my current medical conditions, are there any routine tests that should be performed?**
Depending on your illness, certain tests may have to be performed at least once a year.
- **Ask about those embarrassing issues you'd rather not.**
Ask those sensitive questions ... the ones that you're too shy to even search for on the Internet! Remember, your doctor is there to help you, and any discussions you have stay between you and your doctor.



Tips

- Dress comfortably for your check-up.
- Write down your questions before your appointment. It can be difficult to remember everything once you're in the exam room. Never be embarrassed to voice your questions and concerns, and always be honest. It's all for the good of YOUR health.
- Be aware of your medical scheme benefits. Some people are apprehensive to attend a routine visit, or perform certain tests if they are unsure if their scheme will fund these. Your medical scheme may make provision for certain routine benefits depending on your condition.

If you are unsure about anything related to your Scheme benefits, it is vital that you consult with the Scheme prior to attending a routine check-up to understand what is available on your plan and for your condition.

References

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Take care of your ticker

Walk to the beat of your heart.

Your heart is roughly the size of your clenched fist and it packs quite a punch for such a small muscle. Think of your heart as a pump that is responsible for circulating blood all around your body. Your heart has a left and right side. The right side receives blood from the body and pumps it to your lungs, and the left side receives blood from your lungs and pumps it out to the rest of your body.

It is important for blood to be pumped through your body, because it ensures that your body has enough oxygen and nutrients, and that waste is carried away.

Did you know?

- Heart attacks are now more common in younger people and in women.
- Nutritionally, our diets are rich in inflammatory omega-6 fats, too much refined sugars and not enough fruit and leafy vegetables. This translates to higher inflammation levels in our arteries and a higher risk of plaque formation, which leads to heart attacks.

Your heart has the important job of keeping you alive, so why not give it a helping hand?

Focus on your middle: Reducing your waist size has more benefits than just looking good in your swimsuit. Carrying too much weight around your middle increases your blood pressure, damages your heart, and affects the quality of your blood. Avoid large amounts of fast foods and include abdominal exercises in your workout routine.

Get your heart racing: Exercise is important to keep your heart in a great condition. Start out by making a few simple changes; this will help you to do enough daily exercise to keep your heart happy. Take the stairs instead of the lift, play with your kids at the park instead of just watching them, take a walk during your break at work, and choose a longer route when taking a walk. As you become fitter, add different types of exercise – variety will help keep it interesting! Ask your doctor's advice if you're unsure if any new type of exercise may be suitable for you.

Find your happy place: You know that feel-good feeling when you're in your comfort zone? That feeling can keep your heart happy too. Find a place where you feel relaxed and spend time there at least a few times a week. Relaxing lowers levels of the potentially harmful stress hormone (cortisol) and other stress triggers.

Know what you eat: Make healthier and smarter diet choices by simply checking food labels for calories and additives that are usually bad for your body. Knowing what you're eating will help you understand your diet better, and help you to make healthy choices for your heart and overall health. Eat a good amount of good sources of omega-3 fats, including chia seeds, cold pressed flaxseed oil, oily fish and nuts. In the right amounts, omega-3 fats may lower blood pressure slightly, reduce blood clotting, and decrease stroke and the risk of heart failure.

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Heart-healthy tips:

- Exercise regularly and make sure that all your risk factors are assessed and managed by your doctor.
- Keep tabs on your blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol to ensure that your heart is healthy. Learn the optimal levels and speak with your doctor if anything worries you.
- Love your pet, love your heart. Pets are shown to lower stress levels which are harmful for your heart health, so it may be time for a furry little friend?
- Comply with your treatment plan and doctor visits.

References:

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Lose weight **WITH** carbs

Did you know? There are some good carbs that can help with weight loss.

In the last few years, carbs have had mostly negative publicity. As a result, some people are now avoiding the bread basket altogether. But most dieticians worldwide believe healthy carbohydrates should form part of weight watchers' diets.

Carbs keep energy levels up and add fibre, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants to the diet.

Can I eat carbs and lose weight?

"Carbohydrates can play a role in weight loss," says Daleen Roch r, a South African dietician. "But, it's important to have healthy carbs in the correct amounts." Roch r's advice is in line with a study from the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center for Human Nutrition.

The researchers discovered a 20 to 25% increase in fat metabolism among study subjects who consumed 5.4% of their total carbohydrate intake as resistant starch (resists digestion and allows you to feel fuller for longer). This rate held steady throughout the day. Of the 4 451 study subjects studied, the slimmest ones ate the most starch-resistant carbs.

"Resistant starch foods shrink fat cells, increase muscle mass, curb cravings and keep people feeling full for longer. The key is to increase total carb intake and up the percentage of carbs from starch-resistant foods," said the researchers.

Starch-resistant foods include:

- Low GI wholegrain bread
- Sweet potatoes
- Polenta (cornmeal)
- Bananas
- Legumes (e.g. beans, lentils and chickpeas)
- Oats
- Barley
- Bulgur wheat
- Brown rice
- Wholegrain pasta made from durum wheat.



REMEMBER!

A healthy diet that includes good carbs, with a regular exercise routine, will yield better results. It is important however that you first speak to a registered dietician or your doctor before making any changes to your diet.

10 festive season traps

The holiday season looms and all you want to do is relax. But that's not always easy because 'life is the thing that happens while you're making other plans'.

To get the most out of your break, try and avoid the following festive season stressors.

1. Guests galore

Having house guests can be fun for a day or three, but after that, it could become a chore if you are seen as the entertainer, caterer, tour guide, and cleaner. The solution? Put together a duty roster for the cooking and the cleaning. Entertaining all the time is exhausting so be sure to plan downtime and take it. And don't feel guilty if you don't accompany your guests on every single outing.



2. Feeding frenzy

Most people end the festive season with a few extra kilos that weren't there in November. While it's fine to give in to temptation, the key is to watch **how much** you're eating. Try to enjoy small portions. Eat one helping of dessert, not three. Have one glass of wine, not five.

3. Booze bonanza

From the office party to friends' homes to family braais – alcohol is no stranger to the festive season. By all means have a drink or two, **if you're not driving**, but don't binge.

4. Social calendar

While some people wish everything could be a little quieter, others dream of the phone ringing or a horde of guests arriving. If that's you, the secret is to arrange a few things in advance. Invite people for supper, get a friend to join you for a movie, or organise a day or two away in a different place. Don't wait until the festive season is upon you before doing something about your social calendar. It's not going to happen by itself.



5. Exercise inactivity

Most people give their exercise regimes a break during the festive season. That's the fastest way to weight gain, and misery in the New Year. Keeping to your regular exercise routine or enjoying some summer activities can do a lot to counteract the kilojoule onslaught of the festive season. Go for a walk with the family, run along the beach, or play volleyball.

6. Credit card crisis

If you find yourself in the shopping mall with your year-end bonus and your credit card, don't be roped in by all those Christmas specials. You're going to be stone broke in January, and depressed in February when your credit card statements arrive. You can probably buy just as nice a present for R100 as you can for R200 or R400. You just need to plan it well. It's the thought that counts, not the size of the invoice.

7. Sunburn stress

The southern hemisphere sun is vicious – and skin cancer is a real danger. Burning yourself to a crisp, or having a whimpering and sunburnt child on your hands, is no way to spend Christmas. Speak to your pharmacist and get a high-factor sunblock before you head for the beach. Remember: sunblock has to be re-applied every two hours and swimming can wash it all off. The sun's UV rays can penetrate up to a metre into the water, so being underwater is no protection from the sun.

8. Crowd control

Spare yourself the crush. Do your gift shopping in November, and a bulk grocery shop before 15 December. Milling crowds can be exhausting, and can bring out everything but the Christmas spirit in you!

9. Gift of the grab

Frantic last-minute gift-buying is a killer – not only do you not get what you are looking for, you also spend a fortune on it. Rather than give unwanted and expensive presents, go for gift vouchers – at least people will appreciate them, even if they are not the most personal of offerings.

10. Family fest

You get family, you don't choose them. And never is it more obvious than at Christmas time. Family get-togethers seldom do much for your self-esteem, but it will be bearable if you remind yourself that Christmas only comes once a year.

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