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YOUR CARE

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2017



Love yourself
enough to
live a healthy
lifestyle

Dear Member

This month we focus on two of the more prominent **side effects of diabetes**, namely, **blindness and foot damage**. Blindness as a result of diabetes is the third leading cause of sight loss in South Africa, with 8 000 new cases of visual impairment being diagnosed every year.

With Back Week observed in September, it is worth knowing how to **manage your back pain** should it arise, and what you can do to ease your discomfort.

Also in this edition, we profile how, just by eating well and exercising, you can **keep your heart in peak condition**.

Till next month, here's to a healthy and balanced life!

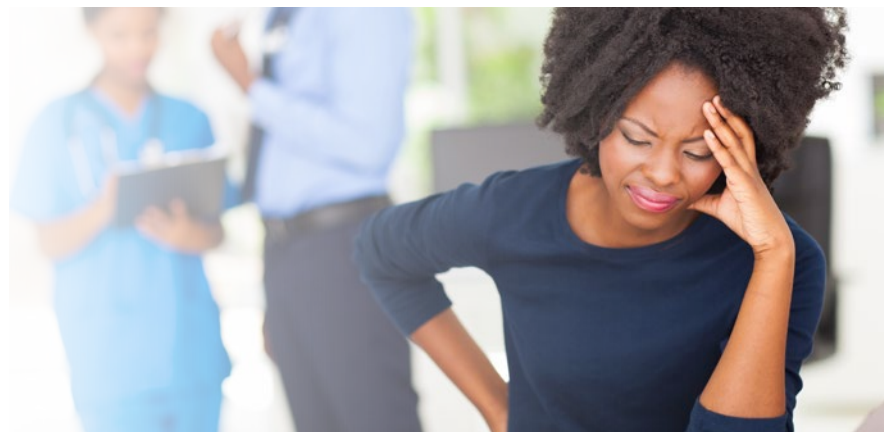
POLMED YOUR CARE Support Team



Keep an eye on diabetes

Diabetic eye disease is a group of eye conditions that can affect people with diabetes. These conditions include diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema (DME), cataract and glaucoma.

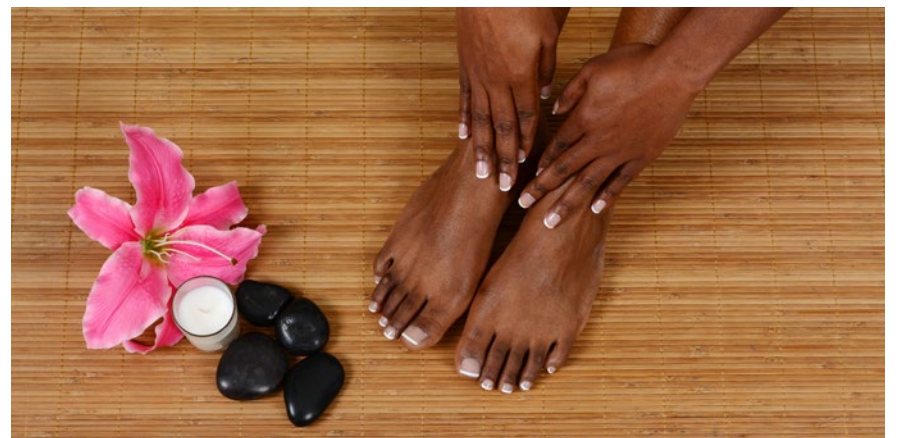
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Ease the strain

Back pain is a dull, constant ache or a sudden/sharp pain that makes it hard to move. It is usually caused by everyday tasks that we wouldn't see as strenuous enough to cause harm.

[Read more ...](#)



Find your footing

Diabetes can impact various aspects of your overall health – including your feet. Proper foot care should be an important part of your daily routine if you have diabetes.

[Read more ...](#)



Your toughest muscle

Your heart is the size of your fist, but it packs a punch! This Heart Awareness Month, keep your heart in top condition by eating well and exercising.

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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.



Keep an eye on diabetes

Don't let diabetes steal your eyesight.

Diabetes is quickly becoming an epidemic, affecting nearly two million South Africans. What's even more worrying is that the condition is the third leading cause of blindness in South Africa, with 8 000 new cases of vision impairment every year.

How diabetes affects your eyes

If you have diabetes, your body is unable to control your blood sugar levels due to a lack of insulin or ineffective insulin. Diabetic eye disease is a group of eye conditions that can affect people with diabetes. These conditions include diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema (DME), cataract and glaucoma.

- **Diabetic retinopathy:** When the small blood vessels at the back of the eye start to leak (fluid or blood) or become blocked.
- **Diabetic macular edema (DME)** is a consequence of diabetic retinopathy: Blood and other fluid can seep into the retina, causing it to swell. This can lead to visual blurring, especially if your diabetes is poorly controlled.
- **Cataract** is a clouding of the eye's lens. People with diabetes are also at an increased risk for cataracts. Cataracts develop earlier in diabetics and grow more rapidly than in people without diabetes.
- **Glaucoma** is a group of eye diseases which cause damage to your eye's optic nerve. In most cases, it is associated with increased pressure within the eye. The risk for glaucoma is twice as high in diabetics as in non-diabetics.

It is vital that you catch these conditions before they cause permanent damage. Since early detection and treatment can reduce the risk of blindness by 95%, people with diabetes should get a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year.

Early detection can reduce the risk of blindness by 95%



Save your sight

- Some eye diseases have no early warning symptoms. Keep up to date with annual eye exams.
- Controlling diabetes – by taking medications as prescribed, staying physically active and maintaining a healthy diet – can prevent or delay vision loss.
- If you notice an odd symptom, don't ignore it! **Things to watch out for:** sudden loss of vision in one or both eyes, sudden blurry vision, persistent flashes of light on the edge of the field of vision, loss of vision that looks like a curtain descending, the appearance of haloes or rainbows around light, sudden eye pain, double vision or squint. Any blow to the eye that results in a red spot on any part of the eye should also be taken seriously.
- Wear safety glasses when mowing the grass, playing sports, or handling dangerous goods or machinery. Make sure that household aerosol nozzles are turned away from your face. Fireworks and sparklers can also pose a hazard to your eyes.
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes against harmful UV rays.
- Eat foods rich in carotenoids, like kale, raw spinach, and other leafy dark green vegetables. Carotenoids can help maintain healthy eyes, and protect against eye diseases.
- Smoking causes damage to the retina – avoid second-hand smoking too.

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Find your footing

Remember – look after your feet and they will look after you.

Diabetes is a metabolic disease that causes your body to create too much blood glucose (blood sugar). This happens either because your body struggles to produce insulin, or because your body's cells don't respond properly to it.

It is also, unfortunately, a condition that can impact major and minor parts of your overall health – including your feet. Proper foot care should be an important part of your daily routine if you have diabetes. Common foot problems can possibly lead to infection and serious complications, like amputation or swelling, so it's especially important for you to keep your feet clean and healthy.

Why are diabetics more at risk?

Your feet are especially at risk if you have high blood sugar as a diabetic.

- Two conditions called diabetic neuropathy (nerve damage) and peripheral vascular (blood flow problem) disease can damage your feet and other areas of the body.
- Exercise is at the top of the to-do list for managing your diabetes, but diabetes complications can make them more prone to injury.

Tread lightly

- **Do: keep trim**

Trim your nails regularly using a good pair of nail clippers. Picking at nails or haphazard nail clipping can lead to ingrown nails and nail infections. Do not clip your nails too short and do not cut down in to the corners.

- **Do: moisturise**

Use a moisturiser daily on your feet. Dry skin can lead to callus formation and cause heel cracks. Do not apply cream between the toes.

- **Do: wash and go!**

Wash your feet daily in warm soapy water. Do not soak the feet too long as this will destroy the natural oils in the skin. Remember to dry the feet thoroughly afterwards, particularly between the toes. This will also prevent athlete's foot.

- **Do: wear the shoe that fits**

Choose shoes that are the correct size and provide your feet with comfort and support. Always wear the right shoe for the right occasion, like supportive athletic shoes when you exercise. Socks are also important. Make sure that you have clean socks daily. If you have diabetic neuropathy, it can be hard to tell if shoes fit right, so ask for help from a professional shoe fitter at an athletic shoe store.

- **Do: get moving**

Exercise regularly to maintain and improve the circulation in the feet.

Always
wear the
right shoe
for the right
occasion

- **Don't: skin yourself**

Remove hard skin gently with a pumice stone. Don't ever cut or dig into hard skin yourself. This can lead to painful complications.

- **Don't: pop blisters**

Allow the moisture in the blister to be naturally reabsorbed into the skin. For cuts or wounds on the feet, visit your nearest clinic for a nurse to assess the wound before managing it yourself at home.

- **Don't: ignore foot irritations**

Get help from a podiatrist if you have foot pain or if problems persist. Refer to the POLMED Guide to your Health booklet for the podiatrist benefits available on your plan.



Ease the strain

Everyone experiences back pain, but with proper care, it can be managed and prevented.

Back pain can be described as a dull, constant ache or a sudden or sharp pain that makes it hard to move. It is usually caused by everyday tasks that we wouldn't see as strenuous enough to harm our backs, which cause minor sprains, strains or injuries.

Inflammation is your body's reaction to injury. When inflammation occurs, your body releases chemicals that increase the blood flow to the area of injury. Some of the chemicals cause a leak of fluid into the tissues, resulting in swelling. This protective process stimulates nerves and causes pain.

Take care when:

- lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling heavy objects
- twisting awkwardly
- sitting too long
- sneezing too hard
- overusing your muscles: for example, during sport or repetitive movements.

Goodbye, back pain

Keep moving

Stretching improves flexibility, which decreases back pain. Yoga combines stretching with strength and balance poses, which help support weak muscles and release tight ones. Strength training is great for back pain because it stabilises and strengthens your whole body. Pilates strengthens core muscles that support the spine, decreasing your risk of injury. It also boosts flexibility, making it easier for you to move without pain.

Stand tall

Yes, your bad posture or hunched shoulders could be a reason for your back pain. Poor posture puts unnecessary strain on your back. Good posture is a habit you must learn:

1. Every time you stand up, check to see if your body is straight in line.
2. Do not slouch! Work your spine.
3. Lie face down on your bed with your arms out in front and your legs straight.
4. Lift one arm and the opposite leg, hold for a count of 10, and then repeat on the other side.
5. Do this at least twice a day.
6. A strong core helps support your back and abs, and makes good posture easier. Do core exercises daily, such as crunches to help your posture.

Get hot and cold

Heat or cold can comfort back pain. Use whichever you find comforting as long as your skin is protected. Heat can be applied with heating pads, warm water bottles or hot showers. Cold can be applied using cold packs, a cold shower, an ice bath and frozen packaged items.

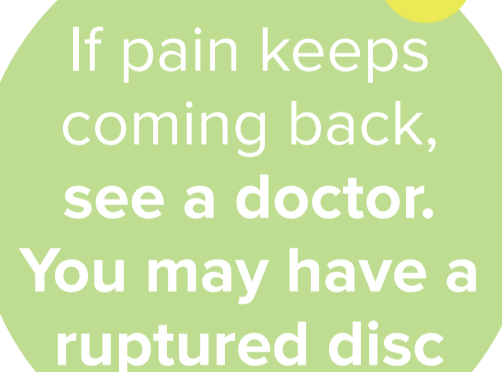
Sleep right

Good sleep is vital, but the position that you sleep in is just as important. Sleeping uncomfortably or on a mattress without support can cause back pain.

- If you sleep on your back, place pillows under your knees.
- If you sleep on your side, place pillows between your knees to keep your spine in a neutral position.
- Sleeping on your stomach causes your neck and head to twist and can put undue stress on your back.

Good to know:

- Back pain should subside within 48 hours with a non-prescription pain reliever.
- You need immediate attention if you have a loss of bladder or bowel control with your back pain.
- If the pain keeps coming back or lasts longer than three days despite being on pain medication, see a doctor. You may have begun to rupture a disc or have another injury that could require treatment.



If pain keeps coming back, see a doctor. You may have a ruptured disc

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Your toughest muscle

It is Heart Awareness Month. Do you know how to keep yours in top condition?

It's the size of your fist, but it packs a punch.

A normal, healthy heart is a strong, hard-working pump made of muscle tissue. And, just by eating well and exercising, you can keep your heart in peak condition.

Hearty benefits

Exercise goes beyond just the physical rewards. It can also:

- **Strengthen your heart muscle.** A strong heart muscle can pump oxygen-rich blood to every organ in your body. Adequate blood flow and circulation is crucial for your body to function properly.
- **Lower your blood pressure.** High blood pressure causes your heart to work harder and can affect blood flow to your heart.
- **Lower levels of triglycerides.** These are the 'bad' fats in the blood. High triglyceride levels can increase your risk for heart disease.
- **Lower 'bad' cholesterol.** High levels of bad cholesterol can lead to plaque build-up in your arteries, which can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.
- **Raise 'good' cholesterol.** Good cholesterol works by flushing out bad cholesterol, reducing your risk for heart disease.
- **Reduce levels of C-reactive protein (CRP).** CRP is a sign of inflammation in the body. The higher the levels of CRP in your blood, the higher your risk for heart disease.
- **Reduce anxiety, depression and stress,** as well as other psychological disorders known to increase heart disease risk.



5 ways to work that muscle!

1. Walk

Quick daily walks can lower your blood pressure and cholesterol, and reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke. To increase your daily step quota, use the stairs instead of the lift, take a quick walk during your lunch break, or walk after supper.

2. Swim

A few laps around the pool can strengthen your heart and boost overall fitness. It also makes the heart pump more efficiently, which means better blood flow. Start off slow by doing as many laps as you can in five minutes. Then, work your way up, mixing your strokes and speeds. Add water aerobics to your routine to keep it fresh.

3. Dance

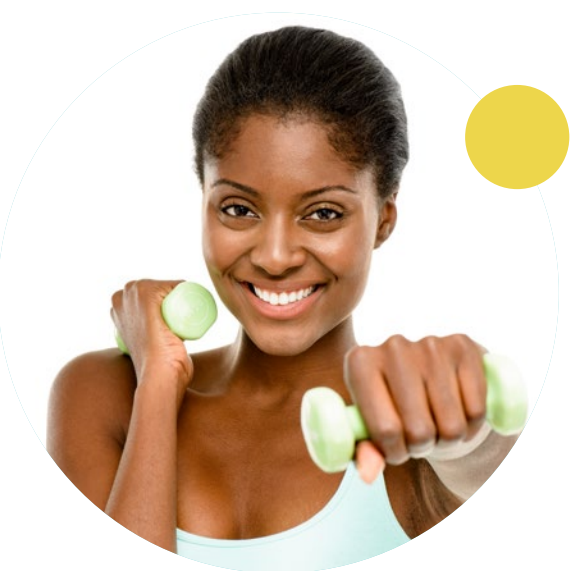
Waltzing away with a partner, in a group, or on your own can help you stay physically and mentally fit. Whether you're doing it competitively or socially, dancing can enhance your muscle tone, strength, and flexibility. It can also reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

4. Weight train

Pumping iron works practically every muscle in your body, including your heart. Build strength and keep your heart happy by lifting light. Start with two to five kilogram dumbbells. Try different techniques and positions. Then, slowly work your way up to heavier weights. Never rush into it or you may injure yourself.

5. Stretch

Yoga can boost heart health and overall wellbeing, and has been shown to improve heart rate. Inflammation can damage the heart muscle, which can up your risk for heart attack and other cardiovascular issues. Strike a pose and join a yoga class. If you prefer, get started at home. There are many YouTube videos you can watch to get you going.



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