

YOUR CARE POLMED

October 2021



“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor’s book”
- Irish proverb



Dear Member

In this month's edition, we give you helpful tips on **coping with stress** by using self-care techniques like stretching and breathing exercises. We all experience stress at certain times, and using these techniques can help to manage it.

With October being Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we show you how to **check yourself for breast cancer**, and how properly managing your chronic health conditions will help you look after your **kidneys**.

Lastly, we take a look at **facts and myths about the COVID-19 vaccinations** so that you can make an informed decision about getting vaccinated.

Have a healthy October!

Kind regards,
Polmed Your Care Support Team

In this issue...

MANAGE CHRONIC CONDITIONS FOR KIDNEY HEALTH

To ensure that your kidneys remain at optimal health, it's important to manage your chronic condition.

[▶ READ MORE...](#)

MYTHS AND FACTS AROUND THE COVID-19 VACCINE

It's important to separate the myths from the facts in order to make an informed decision about getting the COVID-19 vaccination.

[▶ READ MORE...](#)

CHECK YOURSELF FOR BREAST CANCER

One of the best ways to detect breast cancer early is through a monthly routine breast self-examination.

[▶ READ MORE...](#)

STRETCH AWAY THE STRESS

You can ease tension and reduce stress levels by using self-care techniques such as stretching.

[▶ READ MORE...](#)

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*Please use the latest browser to view the Electronic Vaccination Data System (EVDS).



**IF YOU ARE OVER 18 YEARS OLD,
REGISTER AND GET VACCINATED NOW!**

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Stretch away the stress



A recent survey looked at the most stressful cities in the world. With 100 cities participating, the survey found:



Johannesburg is the 49th most-stressed city, while Cape Town ranked 51st in the world.

Stress can cause tension in the body, leading to aches and pains, especially in the neck and shoulder area.

However, you can **ease the tension** and **reduce stress levels** by using **self-care techniques such as stretching**.

STRESS-RELIEVING ACTIVITIES

If you're feeling tense, try one of the following easy activities:

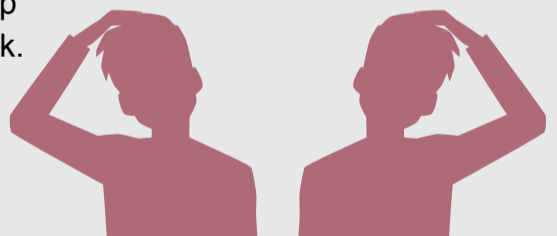
1. Chest-opener

- Reach out your arms and hold your hands behind your back.
- Squeeze your shoulder blades towards each other.
- Push your chest out.



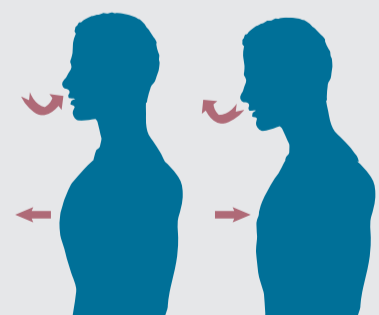
2. Neck stretch

- Stand up, with your left arm at your side.
- Put your right hand on your head – your fingers should be pointing to your left side.
- Now gently pull your head towards the right side, and stop pulling when you feel a stretch in the left side of your neck.
- Hold this position for 20 - 30 seconds, and then slowly return your head to its normal position.
- Repeat this with your left hand and left side.



3. Breathing exercise

- Slowly and deeply, inhale through your nose. Your shoulders should be relaxed and, when you inhale, your abdomen should expand, but your chest should rise only a little.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth and purse your lips slightly, but keep your jaw relaxed.
- Repeat until you start to feel better.



Note: Consult your doctor before starting a new exercise programme.

We all experience stress at certain times, and stretching is a great way to help manage it. It's important to reach out for professional mental health support if it's taking a toll on your health.

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Check yourself for breast cancer



Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in South Africa.

However, if breast cancer is detected early **survival rate can be as high as 99%**

One of the best ways to detect breast cancer early is through a **monthly routine breast self-examination**.

HOW TO DO A BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION:

- 1. Stand topless in front of a mirror:** With your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips, examine your breasts visually for any changes in size, colour or shape. Also check your nipples for any discharge.
- 2. Lift up your arms:** Look for the same changes listed above.
- 3. Check your breasts when lying down:** Place a pillow under your right shoulder and then place your right arm behind your head. Now, using your right hand to feel your left breast and your left hand to feel your right breast, use the flats of your three middle fingers to gently, but firmly, press down on and around the entire breast and armpit area. Check for lumps or other physical changes.
- 4. In the shower:** You may find it more comfortable to feel your breasts when they are wet. Follow the procedure as explained in step 3 above.



WHAT DOES A LUMP FEEL LIKE?

Some lumps feel almost like a soft button – round, soft and movable. However, others can be painful, immobile and hard.

DOES A LUMP MEAN I HAVE CANCER?

Not at all. In fact, 80% of breast lumps are non-cancerous. This doesn't mean though you shouldn't go to the doctor if you find one. If the lump happens to be cancerous, **visiting the doctor as soon as you detect it can save your life.**

As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month,
it's a good time to get into the habit of checking your breasts monthly.

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Myths and facts around the COVID-19 vaccine



A survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council and the University of Johannesburg has revealed that 72% of South Africans are willing to get vaccinated. This is 5% more than previously surveyed, which shows that COVID-19 vaccine acceptance has risen.

With so much conflicting information about the COVID-19 vaccine in the news and on social media, it's still important to separate the myths from the facts in order to make an informed decision about getting vaccinated.

MYTH 1:

The vaccine isn't safe, because it was created so quickly.



Scientists have been researching coronaviruses long before the COVID-19 pandemic. But when the world came to a standstill, there was more co-operation among scientific bodies and countries, which fast-tracked the development of the vaccines.

This doesn't mean any step was skipped when it comes to the safety of the vaccine. The South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) is an independent health body that follows strict guidelines when approving health products and, like the World Health Organisation, it has approved the use of four vaccines: Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca and Sinovac-CoronaVac.



MYTH 2:

I've had COVID-19, so I don't need the vaccine.



Reinfection is still possible, so those who have had COVID-19 can still benefit from vaccination. Getting vaccinated can also help to achieve herd immunity. This is when most of the population is immune to a disease, offering an indirect protection to those who aren't.



MYTH 3:

The COVID-19 vaccine has severe side effects.



While the vaccines may have side effects, they aren't serious or dangerous, and they go away in a few days. The most common are headaches, fever or body aches. According to SAHPRA, severe allergic reactions are incredibly rare (they occur at a rate of 0.02% cases per 7.1 million shots given).

If you should experience a reaction, the vaccine sites are fully equipped to provide you with the necessary care.



FACT: If you get COVID-19 after having the vaccine, your risk for severe illness and death from the virus is significantly lower. Research has found that the vaccines are around 80% efficient against severe illness and death.

Register here for the COVID-19 vaccine:



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Note: Information herein true at date of publication in October 2021. While every effort is made to ensure that communication is aligned to the most recent guidelines and/or expert recommendations, given the rapid pace at which new evidence is being updated, we cannot guarantee the relevance of content following distribution of this communication.

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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.

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Manage chronic conditions
for kidney health



A chronic condition, such as diabetes, hypertension or HIV/AIDS, is one of the many factors that can affect kidney health. To ensure that your kidneys remain at optimal health, it's important to manage your chronic condition.



Diabetes

Approximately 4 million South Africans are currently living with diabetes. Abnormally high blood sugar levels can damage blood vessels in the body, including those found in the kidney; this results in abnormal kidney function or kidney failure.

Diabetes can also cause nerve damage, affecting the nerves in your bladder. If these nerves are damaged, you won't know when your bladder is full. This results in you failing to empty your bladder on time. The constant build-up of urine can also cause kidney damage.



Hypertension

Hypertension is the most common chronic condition in South Africa. High blood pressure can reduce blood flow to the kidneys, which can affect how they remove waste.



HIV

Statistics indicate that 7.5 million people in South Africa are living with HIV, one of the highest prevalence rates in the world.

"People living with HIV face an increased risk for kidney disease, as HIV and the medications used to manage it can be detrimental to how the kidney works," explains Dr Muhammed Hassen, a Johannesburg-based Nephrologist.



Caring for your kidneys with a chronic condition

If you have a chronic condition, regular testing is important. The following tests should be done at least once a year:

1. Serum creatinine (blood specimen)

This is the most important test for assessing kidney function, measuring how well the kidneys are doing their job of filtering toxins from the blood.

2. Urine micro-albumin (urine specimen)

This test is used to detect protein (albumin) in the urine. Diabetes, hypertension and HIV can cause albumin to leak into the urine, and this can be an earlier sign of kidney disease than high serum creatinine levels.

3. Blood pressure check

Developing high blood pressure can be another early sign of kidney disease. It goes both ways: kidney disease can cause hypertension, and hypertension can cause (or worsen) kidney disease.



Staying on top of your chronic condition can help to keep both you and your kidneys healthy.

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- Dr Muhammed Hassen, Nephrologist

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