



POLMED

OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE

YOUR CARE POLMED

August 2024

**“Eat less sugar. You are
sweet enough already”**

Anonymous

Dear Member

Addiction. That’s a word we generally reserve for things like tobacco, alcohol, and the more hard-core substances, not sugar. Did you know that sugar can be just as addictive? Yup. That’s right. Researchers have found that sugar lowers both opioid and dopamine receptor availability in our brains. In other words, sugar dials up the volume on our brain’s reward and pleasure centre the same way other addictive substances do.

Plenty of us have a sweet tooth; sugar tastes so good, after all. It’s a source of energy, not just for our bodies but for our brains. Just because you enjoy the odd chocolate bar doesn’t mean you’re a sugar addict. But cutting down on sugary treats could benefit your health, reducing your risk of weight-related diseases like type 2 diabetes or heart diseases.

So, with that in mind, this month, our article shares tips on curbing sugar cravings. Our monthly infographics explore why breastfeeding is so good for you and your baby and the steps you can take to quit smoking.

We hope that you have a happy, healthy month ahead!

YourCare Team

In this issue...

BURNING OUT: HOW TO CUT BACK ON SMOKING AND QUIT

Isn’t it time you improved the health of your lungs? So, stop smoking and join the GoSmokeFree Campaign.

[➤ READ MORE...](#)

WHY BREAST IS BEST FOR MOTHER AND CHILD

Research shows that breastfeeding helps to protect and boost the health of both mother and child.

[➤ READ MORE...](#)

FROM CRAVING TO CONTROL: OVERCOMING SUGAR ADDICTION

Whether you’re living with diabetes or not, quitting sugar can be as challenging as overcoming any other addiction. Weaning yourself through small, incremental changes – and realistic goals – is the way to go.

[➤ READ MORE...](#)



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BURNING OUT: HOW TO CUT BACK ON SMOKING AND QUIT

STATISTICS INDICATE THAT:

ABOUT **12.7 MILLION** SOUTH AFRICANS aged 15 years and older currently use tobacco.



OVER **35 000** SOUTH AFRICANS die from tobacco-related causes each year.



Smoking can increase the risk of serious health conditions for both smokers and those around them. These conditions include:



HEART DISEASE:
Smokers are two to four times more likely to have heart disease than non-smokers



DIABETES:
Both smokers and passive smokers are at an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes



LUNG CANCER:
80-90% of all lung cancer cases are due to cigarette smoking, with passive smokers facing a 20-30% increased risk



ASTHMA:
Exposure to smoking can trigger asthma attacks in children

HOW TO CUT BACK:



Identify your triggers, such as social settings, stress and alcohol



Manage stress with journaling, praying or deep-breathing exercises



Create smoke-free areas, such as your car or home



Join a support group



Register on a stop-smoking programme.

POLMED have partnered with GoSmokeFree to support our members in their quitting journey. Visit www.polmed.co.za or call **0860 765 633** for more info on this programme.

ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF QUITTING

AFTER 12 HOURS

Blood flow improves



3 DAYS LATER

Breathing improves



3 MONTHS LATER

Breathing is deeper and clearer



5 YEARS LATER

The risk for cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus and bladder is halved



15 YEARS LATER

The risk for heart disease or stroke is similar to that of a non-smoker



AFTER 48 HOURS

The body is free of nicotine



WITHIN 12 WEEKS

Blood circulation and lung function improve by 30%



A YEAR AFTER QUITTING

The risk for heart disease drops by 50%



10 YEARS LATER

The risk for lung cancer is halved compared to that of smokers

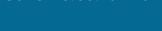
Quitting smoking doesn't happen overnight, but small, incremental steps will ultimately bring better health for both you and those around you.

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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 polmeddiseaseaman@medscheme.co.za with your membership number and contact details.



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WHY BREAST IS BEST FOR BOTH MOTHER AND CHILD

Research shows that breastfeeding helps to protect and boost the health of both mother and child.



Yet only around
32% OF SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN
are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their lives.

THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING FOR BABIES:



PREVENTION OF OBESITY:

Around 13% of South African children under the age of five are overweight.



REDUCED RISK OF SIDS:

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome has a prevalence of 3.7 per 1 000 live births in South Africa.



REDUCED RISK OF CHILDHOOD LEUKAEMIA:

The most common cancer diagnosed in South African children is leukaemia.



STRENGTHENED IMMUNE SYSTEM:

Breast milk provides antibodies that protect against infection.



NUTRITION:

Infants absorb more nutrients from breast milk than from formula.



HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT:

As breast milk has more nutrients, breastfed babies tend to have better eye health and higher cognitive skills.



REDUCED DIARRHOEA:

Around 20% of deaths in South African children under the age of five are linked to diarrhoea.

THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING FOR MOTHERS:



Faster recovery after giving birth, with less bleeding



Stronger emotional bonding between mother and child



Reduced risk for breast cancer



Reduced risk for coronary heart disease and stroke



Low cost

PRODUCING BREAST MILK

If you struggle to produce enough breast milk, there are alternatives, such as formula. However, you can encourage the body's production and release of breast milk by practising the following habits.



Drink plenty of water



Follow a healthy diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains



Get regular sleep



Reduce stress



Massage your breasts



Consume ginger drinks



Speak to your doctor about prescribed medication

IS BREAST ALWAYS BEST?

If you are HIV positive, breastfeeding may not be encouraged, unless you are on ARVs and have a suppressed (undetectable) viral load. Nonetheless, it's best to speak to your doctor or paediatrician about the best options for both you and your child.

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FROM CRAVINGS TO CONTROL: OVERCOMING SUGAR ADDICTION

The term ‘**addiction**’ is usually reserved to describe strong attachments to alcohol and drugs. Yet, it’s equally applicable to the intense craving for sugar.

Sugar releases chemicals in the brain that can leave you feeling euphoric, seeking out the next ‘high’. Some experts suggest that sugar may be even more addictive than cocaine.



As with drugs and alcohol, consuming too much sugar can have serious health consequences, including:



High blood pressure – which currently affects one in three South Africans



Obesity – with 50% of South Africans being either overweight or obese



Diabetes – currently affecting over four million South Africans

On average, South Africans consume about 24 teaspoons of sugar daily—more than double the World Health Organization’s (WHO) recommended limit of 10 teaspoons a day.

CURBING YOUR SWEET TOOTH

Whether you’re living with diabetes or not, quitting sugar can be as challenging as overcoming any other addiction. Weaning yourself through small, incremental changes – and realistic goals – is the way to go.

For many, sugary drinks are the biggest temptation. Here are some tips for using SMART goals to cut back:

- **SPECIFIC:** I’ll reduce my daily sugar intake by reducing sugary drinks.
- **MEASURABLE:** I’ll replace sugary beverages with water or unsweetened green tea.
- **ACHIEVABLE:** I currently drink three glasses of sugary drinks a day. I’ll start by replacing one daily drink with water or unsweetened green tea before moving to only two glasses of sugary drinks per week.
- **RELEVANT:** Cutting back on sugary drinks will help to curb my sweet tooth and protect my health, as sugary drinks can increase the risk for diabetes and obesity.
- **TIME-BOUND:** Within a month, the only beverages I want to consume are water or unsweetened green tea.

Training the brain not to look for the next sugar high can be difficult. Start slowly and be patient – and enjoy the sweeter side of life that’s sugar-free.

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