



POLMED

OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE



YOUR CARE POLMED

October 2024

“Keep your face to the
sunshine, and you will
not see the shadows.”

Hellen Keller

Dear Member

Are you enjoying the longer days as much as we are? Having more daylight to enjoy the things that bring us joy, like spending time with friends or hiking in nature, is as great for our mental health as it is for our physical health. The benefits of vitamin D (which we get from sunshine) on psychological and physical health can't be understated.

While we advocate reaping as many of the benefits of glorious sunshine as possible, be responsible with your sun exposure. Remember your SPF, wear hats, and keep hydrated (especially if you're on SSRI medication, as this makes you more sensitive to sun exposure).

And, if you're looking for some reading material while soaking up some rays, we've got you covered with our monthly article. Since October marks Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we're shining a light on this crucial topic, focusing on the signs and symptoms you should be aware of and how to self-examine at home.

Our monthly infographics include important topics like **Mental Health Matters** in light of Mental Health Awareness Month and **Stroke Prevention** to mark World Stroke Day in October.

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

YourCare Team

In this issue...

WHY SELF-CHECKS AND MAMMOGRAMS MATTER

While breast cancer accounts for 16% of cancer deaths if detected early, the survival rate can be as high as 99%.

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YOU CAN DO SOMETHING TO PREVENT A STROKE

World Stroke Day, in October, focuses on raising awareness around stroke prevention.

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MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS: RECOGNISE THE SIGNS AND SEEK HELP

World Mental Health Month, commemorated in October, aims to raise awareness around mental health and encourage individuals to understand the symptoms of poor mental health so they can get the help they need.

> [READ MORE...](#)



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WHY SELF-CHECKS AND MAMMOGRAMS MATTER

Breast cancer is the most-diagnosed cancer among women in South Africa – the leading cancer among white and Asian women and the second most common cancer among black and coloured women.



Yet, while breast cancer accounts for **16% of cancer** deaths if detected early, the survival rate can be as high as **99%**.



ARE ALL WOMEN AT RISK FOR BREAST CANCER?

Yes, and men, too, but the risk is higher in women and those who:



Have a history of breast cancer in their immediate family



Are overweight



Are inactive



Consume alcohol and follow a poor diet



Smoke

DO YOUR MONTHLY CHECKS

Routine breast self-examinations are important to check for signs. Follow these steps:

- STEP 1** Examine your breasts in front of a mirror with straightened shoulders and your hands on your hips.
- STEP 2** Look for any changes in size, colour or shape, and examine your nipples for any discharge.
- STEP 3** Lift your arms and do the same.
- STEP 4** Lie down with a pillow under your right shoulder and your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand to feel your right breast gently but firmly, press your three middle fingers down, on and around the entire breast and armpit area. A lump can feel either round, soft and movable or painful, immobile and hard.
- STEP 5** Repeat step 4 with your right hand and left breast.
- STEP 6** Standing in the shower, place your right arm behind your head and follow the self-examination process in step 4 without lying down.

GET THAT MAMMOGRAM

Mammograms are X-ray examinations of the breast area that have been found to reduce breast cancer deaths by over 30%. While mammograms aren't recommended for those under 40, people are getting diagnosed with breast cancer at an early age. Therefore, getting a mammogram every two years if you are under 40 and every year if you are 40 and older would be best.



As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, it's the perfect time to start checking your breasts and to book a mammogram based on your scheme benefits and age group.

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YOU CAN DO SOMETHING TO PREVENT A STROKE

EVERY HOUR, AROUND
10 SOUTH AFRICAN ADULTS
SUFFER FROM A STROKE.



Along with being one of the top ten leading causes
of disability, strokes also account for around
25 000 DEATHS PER YEAR.



World Stroke Day, in October, focuses on raising awareness around stroke prevention.

WHAT IS A STROKE?

A stroke is caused by either a blockage of blood flow in the brain (ischaemic) or by bleeding in the brain, which causes the brain to swell (haemorrhagic).



ABOUT **87% OF STROKES**
ARE ISCHAEMIC

RISK FACTORS

However, it's estimated that around **90% of strokes** can be prevented by modifying risk behaviours:



MANAGING STRESS

Almost one in three adults is living with high blood pressure, which can cause blood clots in the brain.



MAINTAINING A HEALTHY WEIGHT

50% of South Africans are either overweight or obese, which can lead to clogged arteries.

For information on our Weight Management Programme and qualifying criteria you may call POLMED on **0860 765 633** (follow the voice prompts to the Disease Management Programme), or send an email to **polmedwmp@medscheme.co.za**



EXERCISING REGULARLY

Over 70% of South Africans are inactive, which can cause a build-up of fatty material in the arteries.



QUITTING SMOKING

11.1 million adults currently smoke tobacco, which can increase blood pressure and reduce oxygen in the blood.

As a POLMED member, you can enroll on our smoking cessation programme called GoSmokeFree by accessing the HealthCraft website on **www.gosmokefree.co.za**. This is offered to you at no additional charge.



MAINTAINING A HEALTHY DIET

A diet high in sugar, salt, trans fats and processed foods can increase blood pressure and cholesterol levels.



TAKING CHRONIC MEDICATION AS PRESCRIBE

How to register your chronic condition

POLMED uses a process called disease authorisation to approve the treatment of your chronic condition as a whole and not just a single medication. This gives you access to a whole list of pre-approved medication for your condition, which is referred to as a basket.

When you need to change or add a new medication for your condition, just take your new prescription to your pharmacy, and they will see if it is linked to your existing condition basket. If the new prescription is not linked, contact the Chronic Medicine Management Programme on **0860 765 633** with your prescription details.

The other 10% of risk factors are non-modifiable and include age, race, sex and genetics.

SPOTTING A STROKE

The best way to spot a stroke is with the **BEFAST** method:



BALANCE:
Loss of
balance



EYES:
Blurred
vision



FACE:
Face
drooping on
one side



ARM:
Weakness in
arm or leg



SPEECH:
Difficulty
speaking



TIME:
Call an
ambulance
timeously

For more information on chronic medication and how to access the chronic medicine benefits, Please contact the POLMED Chronic Medicine Management (CMM) Programme on **0860 765 633** or email **polmedcmm@medscheme.co.za**.

Surviving a stroke is possible, but those who do may often have to deal with issues that can affect quality of life. By taking preventive measures, you can take control of your health.

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MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS: RECOGNISE THE SIGNS AND SEEK HELP

AROUND **25.7%** OF SOUTH AFRICANS
ARE LIVING WITH DEPRESSION.



Apart from the personal cost, it's
costing the economy an estimated

**R19 BILLION
YEARLY.**



World Mental Health Month, commemorated in October, aims to raise awareness around mental health and encourage individuals to understand the symptoms of poor mental health so they can get the help they need.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SADNESS AND DEPRESSION?

One shouldn't assume that sadness is necessarily an indication of depression. The table below shows the difference between the two.

SADNESS

A human emotion

Usually triggered by a specific event, such as death, job loss or heartbreak

Often temporary

Feelings of unhappiness are often the only symptom

Typically resolved on its own or without the need for professional help

Generally does not affect daily functioning

DEPRESSION

A mental health disorder

Many potential triggers, such as chronic stress and a chemical imbalance

Persists for over two weeks

Symptoms include poor concentration, disrupted sleep, changes in appetite and weight, suicidal ideation

Often requires professional help

Can significantly affect daily functioning

GETTING HELP

Poor mental health can have a significant impact on your wellbeing, so it's important to seek professional help as quickly as possible if you identify symptoms that apply to you.

Did you know that POLMED has a Mental Health Programme that offers support to members diagnosed with the following conditions:



Post-traumatic stress disorder



Major depression



Bipolar mood disorder



Substance Abuse

The programme aims to collaborate with you, the member, your Doctor and where appropriate, other healthcare professionals to assist you in improving your mental health and wellbeing.

DEPRESSION AFFECTS PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY

However, common symptoms include:

- Feeling sad or empty for longer periods than feeling content or happy.
- Feeling overwhelmed with life's problems, and not being able to cope.
- Being easily irritated and more aggressive than usual.
- Loss of energy, loss of motivation.
- Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping more than usual.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.
- Frequently tearful.
- Struggling to concentrate and make decisions.
- Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy.
- Feeling worthless.
- Weight loss or weight gain.



Sadly, **75%** of South Africans living with a common mental health condition don't receive treatment.

The lack of treatment is often due to a stigma around poor mental health in certain societies. By seeking mental health support, you can ensure your wellbeing and help to destigmatise the condition.

For more information on your mental health benefits, contact the POLMED Client Service Call Centre on **0860 765 633** and follow the prompts to the Mental Health Programme. Alternatively, send an email to **Polpsych@medscheme.co.za**.

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