POLMED
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YOUR CARE POLMED

April 2025

"Autumn, the season that teaches us that change is beautiful."

Heather Stillufsen

Dear Member

Change isn't always easy - but it can be powerful. As autumn settles in across the southern hemisphere, we're reminded that transformation isn't just inevitable - it's also an opportunity.

Whether you're rethinking your health goals, setting new intentions for your family, or just carving out time to reflect, this season is the perfect moment to reset.

So, if you're looking at shedding a few kilos, kicking the tobacco habit, staying healthy with your flu shot, or just wanting to know more about HIV post-exposure prophylaxis, we've got you! This month's newsletter contains all the articles and infographics you need for a season of transformation and abundance.

As always, we wish you a healthy, happy month ahead.

Regards,
YourCare Team

In this issue...

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON HIV POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS

PEP is an emergency intervention designed to prevent HIV infection after a potential exposure. It involves taking antiretroviral medications for a short period to stop the virus from establishing an infection.

READ MORE...

KICK THE HABIT – AND ADD YEARS TO EVERYONE'S LIFE

Over 39,000 South Africans die from tobacco-related diseases each year. Research suggests that exposure of non-smokers to second-hand smoke is responsible for the deaths of 1.3 million people worldwide.

READ MORE...

FLU SHOTS 101: KEEP YOURSELF AND OTHERS SAFE

Flu is the 5th leading cause of death in South Africa. Getting the flu vaccine is one of the best ways to guard against it.

READ MORE...

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

POLMED is offering qualifying members an opportunity to lose excess weight in a healthy, sustainable way – under the guidance of biokineticists.

READ MORE...

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) ON HIV POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP)

1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF PEP?

PEP is an emergency intervention designed to prevent HIV infection after a potential exposure. It involves taking antiretroviral medications for a short period to stop the virus from establishing an infection.

2. HOW SOON SHOULD PEP BE STARTED AFTER POTENTIAL EXPOSURE?

72 HOURS

PEP should be initiated as soon as possible, ideally within 72 hours of potential exposure to HIV. The sooner it is started, the more effective it is.

3. WHAT STEPS SHOULD I TAKE IF I NEED PEP?

If you believe you have been exposed to HIV, immediately seek medical attention. Visit an emergency room or contact your doctor within the POLMED network to discuss your situation and start the PEP regimen.

4. WHAT DOES THE PEP REGIMEN INVOLVE?

The PEP regimen consists of taking antiretroviral medications daily for the period prescribed by your doctor. Adhering to the prescribed schedule is crucial to ensuring the treatment's effectiveness.

5. ARE THERE ANY FOLLOW-UP REQUIREMENTS AFTER COMPLETING PEP?

Yes, follow-up HIV testing is necessary to confirm that the treatment was successful. Your doctor will schedule these tests and provide ongoing support and counselling.

6. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I EXPERIENCE SIDE EFFECTS FROM PEP?

Contact your doctor if you experience side effects such as nausea, fatigue, or headaches. They can advise you on managing these side effects and ensure that you continue the treatment safely.

7. IS PEP COVERED BY POLMED?

Yes, PEP is covered under the HIV/AIDS management programme for POLMED members. This ensures that you can access the treatment without additional financial burden.

8. HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PEP?

For more information, you can visit your local doctor within the POLMED network, contact our customer service centre, or refer to the POLMED website and benefits guide. Trusted health organisations online also provide valuable resources.

9. WHAT OTHER PREVENTIVE MEASURES SHOULD I CONSIDER ALONGSIDE PEP?

While PEP is effective in preventing HIV after exposure, it is also important to use condoms to protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies. Regular HIV testing and safe practices are also recommended.

10. CAN PEP BE USED MORE THAN ONCE?

PEP can be used more than once if necessary, but it is not intended for regular use. If you find yourself needing PEP frequently, discuss with your doctor other preventive measures, such as PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis).

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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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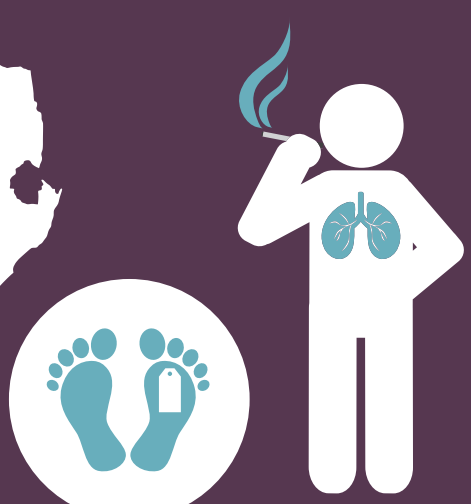
KICK THE HABIT AND ADD YEARS TO EVERYONE'S LIFE

OVER

39 000

South Africans die from tobacco-related diseases each year.



And it's not just smokers at risk. Research suggests that exposure of non-smokers to second hand smoke is responsible for the deaths of

1.3 MILLION INDIVIDUALS WORLDWIDE EVERY YEAR.

Kicking the habit is important for everyone - family, friends, and strangers.

The health risks associated with second hand smoke include:

A 20-30% INCREASED RISK
for lung cancer

A 25-30% INCREASED RISK
for heart disease

An increased risk for **breast cancer, nasal and sinus cancer, stroke, atherosclerosis** and **type 2 diabetes**

An increased risk for **latent tuberculosis (TB)** infection progressing to active disease

An increased risk for **sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), illnesses of the lower respiratory tract, middle-ear infections and asthma**

THE BENEFITS OF QUITTING SMOKING

While many believe e-cigarettes are safer, they can still expose you and innocent bystanders to harmful chemicals and nicotine.

The moment you decide to quit, your body will begin to heal itself:

AFTER 20 MINUTES
Your heart rate and blood pressure begin to drop to a healthier level.

AFTER 12 HOURS
Carbon monoxide levels in your blood return to normal.

TWO WEEKS TO THREE MONTHS
Your circulation and lung function improve, and your risk for heart attack decreases.

BETWEEN ONE AND NINE MONTHS
Coughing and shortness of breath decrease as lung functionality improves.

IN ONE YEAR
Your risk for heart disease is halved.

TWO TO FIVE YEARS
Your risk for cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus and bladder is halved, and your stroke risk matches that of a non-smoker.

AT 10 YEARS
Your risk of dying from lung cancer is halved.

AT 15 YEARS
Your risk for heart disease is the same as for someone who's never smoked.

Quitting smoking isn't just about living longer – it's also about protecting the health of those around you. POLMED covers the GO-SMOKE FREE Programme from the POLMED preventative Healthcare Benefits.

The GoSmokeFree Programme is delivered by a trained nurse through HealthCraft accredited pharmacies. The approach includes motivational behaviour changes, clinical measures (carbon monoxide readings), and follow ups to manage relapse.

Book a pre-quit assessment with a GoSmokeFree advisor. Visit **gosmokefree.co.za** for more information.

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FLU SHOTS 101:
KEEP YOURSELF AND OTHERS SAFE

FLU IS A SERIOUS ILLNESS

IT'S THE **5TH LEADING CAUSE** OF DEATH IN SOUTH AFRICA

One of the best ways to guard against flu is to get the flu vaccine.

This doesn't mean you won't get the flu, but it will reduce your risk and the severity of the illness, so you'll protect yourself and others.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The flu vaccine triggers the development of antibodies, boosting the immune system to defend the body against the virus. Because the flu virus changes from one year to the next, you're advised to vaccinate annually.

WHO NEEDS IT MOST?

Certain individuals are more at risk for severe complications if they contract the flu. These include:

- Children under the age of five, as they have a naive immune system.
- Adults aged 65 and older, as flu can exacerbate existing health conditions.
- Pregnant women, as pregnancy can cause changes to the immune system.
- Obese individuals: Excess weight can impair the immune system.
- Those with chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, or kidney disease.
- Those with respiratory conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and those with tuberculosis (TB) may be at increased risk for flu-associated death.
- Those with weakened immune systems due to factors such as HIV or ongoing cancer treatments.

SIDE-EFFECTS OF THE FLU VACCINE

Common side-effects of the flu vaccine include soreness, redness and/or swelling around the injection site. You may also experience headaches, nausea, and muscle aches.

Flu vaccines from local clinics, hospitals, pharmacies and private practitioners are safe. If you have any concerns, speak to your healthcare practitioner.

DID YOU KNOW?

POLMED offers one flu vaccine per beneficiary per year from the POLMED Preventative Healthcare Benefits. The vaccines will be covered from Risk and will not deplete your out-of-hospital benefits.

If you'd like more information on our Preventative Care Benefit, call our team on **086 076 5633**, or email your query to **polmed@medscheme.co.za**, or use our new 100% secure and private WhatsApp chat to get in touch with POLMED **060 070 2547**.

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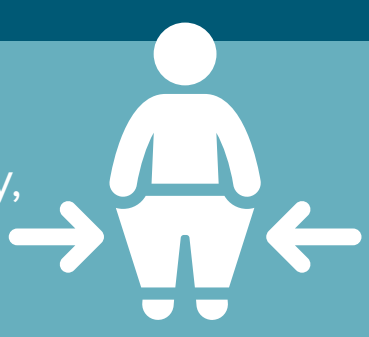
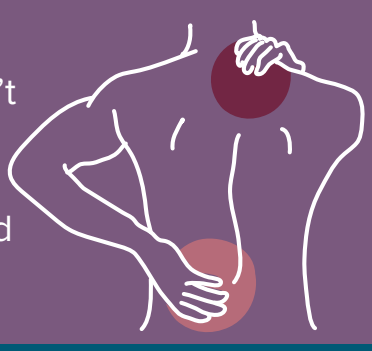
WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

POLMED is offering qualifying members an opportunity to lose excess weight in a healthy, sustainable way – under the guidance of biokineticists.



Numerous studies have shown that being obese or overweight has dangerous health consequences. It substantially increases the risk of morbidity from at least 15 conditions including hypertension, abnormal cholesterol levels, type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnoea and respiratory problems, as well as cancers of the endometrium, breast, prostate, and colon.

Being overweight also places considerable strain on the joints, often resulting in orthopaedic surgery. And if this isn't enough, body weight is associated with an increase in mortality from all causes. In addition, obese patients may suffer from social stigmatisation and discrimination, coupled with mental health issues.



POLMED WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

This has led POLMED to introduce the Weight Management Programme – a programme specifically designed for qualifying members with a high BMI and waist circumference.

Under this programme, members will participate in a 12-week, biokineticist-led intervention plan that will give them access to a dietician and behavioural psychologist with the goal to lose the excess weight and lead healthier lives. Once the programme is completed, ongoing advice and monitoring will also be made available to the member.

WHO QUALIFIES FOR THE PROGRAMME?

POLMED members within the following parameters will be eligible for the programme:

BMI ≥ 30 kg/m^2

OR

Men with a waist circumference ≥ 102 cm

OR

Women with a waist circumference ≥ 88 cm

OR

Other cases identified by a general practitioner or BASA biokineticist supported by a motivation, e.g. member with a BMI between 25.0 kg/ m^2 and 29.9 kg/m with diabetes and comorbidities.

HOW IT WORKS

The weight management programme runs over 12 weeks (three months) and entails:

Once a member or beneficiary has been identified as suitable for the weight management intervention, their GP is notified electronically that their patient has been enrolled on the weight management programme;

Management by a BASA biokineticist which includes:

- Three (3) one-on-one consultations with the biokineticist;
- Referral to a dietician and/or psychologist for two (2) consultations if necessary; and
- The biokineticist submits electronic reports to the member's GP and POLMED after each interaction.

Self-monitoring; and

At the end of the programme, POLMED will contact the member to get feedback and conduct a discussion on health outcomes.

Marine members have access to the obesity care plan after the Weight Management Programme has been completed.

You may call us on 0860 765 633 (follow the voice prompts to the Disease Management Programme) between 08:30 and 17:00 Monday to Friday, or send an email to polmedwmp@medscheme.co.za

DISCLAIMER: This document is a summary for information purposes only and does not supersede the rules of the Scheme. In the event of any discrepancy between this summary and the Rules, the Rules will prevail. A copy of the Rules is available on request.

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