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May 2025

**“Eat less sugar, you're
sweet enough already”**

Anonymous

POLMED Member

A Diabetic Diagnosis can be hard to accept , not just for the person diagnosed but for their loved ones. It means adapting to lifestyle changes, managing blood sugar levels with care and timing insulin doses. And, no, diabetics don't need to cut the sweet stuff completely – they still need sugar!

While too much sugar can be harmful, it is essential - our bodies and brains rely on it for energy. This holds true for diabetics. While too much sugar can trigger diabetic ketoacidosis, too little can be just as dangerous. This brings us back to the careful timing of insulin, daily diligence, a support system that understands the highs and lows.

This month, we're exploring what it means to live a sweet life with diabetes and how you can support a loved one with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. Plus, we've got essential information on complying with HIV medication, an infographic on hypertension, and tips on managing anxiety around dentist visits.

As always, we hope you have a happy and healthy month.

Yours in health,
The YourCare Team

In this issue...

SILENT BUT DEADLY: WHY YOU SHOULD SCREEN FOR HYPERTENSION

World Hypertension Day, commemorated in May, aims to raise awareness about this chronic condition and emphasise the importance of regular blood pressure screening in saving lives since hypertension typically has no noticeable symptoms.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) ON MEDICINE ADHERENCE FOR HIV PATIENTS

Taking your ARVs as prescribed helps to keep the viral load in your body low, preventing the virus from multiplying and reducing the risk of developing drug resistance.

> [READ MORE...](#)

OVERCOMING DENTAL ANXIETY: SIMPLE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR NEXT DENTAL VISIT EASIER

Avoiding dental visits just because they feel stressful or even scary is not the answer. Problems such as tooth decay and gum disease can worsen, leading to more extensive and painful procedures in the future.

> [READ MORE...](#)

BE A SWEET SUPPORT FOR A LOVED ONE WITH DIABETES

Over 4 million South Africans live with diabetes, a chronic condition characterised by high blood sugar. It can be a complex condition to manage, so your loved one will benefit from a bit of help.

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SILENT, BUT DEADLY: WHY YOU SHOULD SCREEN FOR HYPERTENSION

AROUND ONE IN THREE ADULTS

IN SOUTH AFRICA IS LIVING WITH
HYPERTENSION (HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE).



World Hypertension Day, commemorated in May, aims to raise awareness about this chronic condition and emphasise the importance of regular blood pressure screening in saving lives since hypertension typically has no noticeable symptoms.



WHY DO BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENINGS MATTER?

Research suggests that **45 to 49% of people living with hypertension in South Africa are undiagnosed**, raising the risk for complications that include:



Stroke



Heart disease
and heart failure



Kidney disease
and kidney failure



Vision loss

Therefore, it's vital that you get this quick and painless screening regularly to avoid health complications.

To check for hypertension, it is recommended to have a Blood Pressure Measurement as a primary test. A blood pressure cuff is placed around your upper arm and inflated to measure the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats (systolic pressure) and between beats (diastolic pressure). A reading of 130/80 mm Hg or higher is considered hypertension.

Blood pressure tests can be performed as part of your annual Wellness Visit, which pays from your Preventative Healthcare Benefits. Regular monitoring and early detection are key to managing hypertension effectively. If you have any concerns, it's best to consult with your Network General Practitioner.

WHO SHOULD GET BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENINGS?

Everyone should check their blood pressure regularly, but certain individuals are at higher risk for hypertension:

>40

Those over the age of 40



Smokers



Those with a family history
of hypertension



Those who have a high
alcohol intake



Those who are overweight or obese



Those who are physically inactive



Those with diabetes



Those who follow an unhealthy diet

SYMPTOMS OF HYPERTENSION

You should get your blood pressure checked – at a clinic or with your healthcare practitioner – if you continually experience any of the following symptoms:



Blurred vision



Nosebleeds



Buzzing in the ears



Severe headaches



Dizziness



Shortness of breath



Irregular heart rhythm



Vomiting



Nausea

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT HYPERTENSION?

- Get your blood pressure screened regularly
- Follow a healthy, balanced diet that is low in salt
- Exercise regularly
- Manage any stress
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Stop smoking



By identifying elevated blood pressure levels early, your healthcare practitioner can guide you on lifestyle changes to help prevent or manage hypertension, allowing you to enjoy a longer and healthier life.

Hypertension is one of the diseases managed by POLMED. Active Disease Risk Management Programme (ADRM) aims to ensure that members receive health information, guidance and management of their conditions, while at the same time encouraging compliance of the treatment prescribed by their medical practitioner.

Members who are registered on the ADRM Programme, and who have registered chronic medication will receive a Care Plan that contains authorised medical services such as consultations, blood tests and radiological tests related to the management of their conditions.

For more information contact us:
**POLMED Disease Risk Management Programme on
0860 765 633 or email polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za**

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) ON MEDICINE ADHERENCE FOR HIV PATIENTS

1. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TAKE MY ARVS EXACTLY AS PRESCRIBED?



Taking your ARVs as prescribed helps to keep the viral load in your body low, preventing the virus from multiplying and reducing the risk of developing drug resistance. It also helps maintain a strong immune system and improves your overall health.

2. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I MISS A DOSE OF MY ARVS?



If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it's almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for the missed one. Always inform your doctor about missed doses.

3. HOW CAN I REMEMBER TO TAKE MY MEDICATION EVERY DAY?



You can set alarms on your phone, use a pillbox with compartments for each day, or integrate taking your medication into your daily routine, such as with meals or before bed. Some people find it helpful to use medication reminder apps.

4. WHAT ARE THE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF ARVS, AND HOW CAN I MANAGE THEM?



Common side effects include nausea, fatigue, and headaches. These often improve over time. If side effects persist or become severe, contact your doctor. They can offer solutions or adjust your treatment if necessary.

5. CAN I TAKE MY ARVS WITH OTHER MEDICATIONS OR SUPPLEMENTS?



Always inform your doctor about any other medications or supplements you are taking. Some substances can interact with ARVs, affecting their effectiveness or causing side effects.

6. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I EXPERIENCE SEVERE SIDE EFFECTS?



If you experience severe side effects, contact your doctor immediately. They can provide guidance on how to manage the side effects or adjust your treatment plan.

7. HOW OFTEN SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR WHILE ON ARVS?



Regular check-ups are essential to monitor your health and the effectiveness of your treatment. Your doctor will schedule appointments based on your individual needs, typically every 6 months.

8. CAN I STOP TAKING MY ARVS IF I FEEL BETTER?



No, it is crucial to continue taking your ARVs even if you feel better. Stopping treatment can lead to an increase in viral load and the development of drug resistance, making the virus harder to treat.

9. HOW CAN I GET SUPPORT IF I AM STRUGGLING WITH ADHERENCE?



Reach out to your doctor, who can offer resources and support. Joining a support group or talking to friends and family can also provide encouragement and help you stay on track.

10. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED?



Patients suspended will not be able to use the medical aid until reinstated. Please use the state for your ARV medicine until you're reinstated to prevent your condition from worsening.

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Overcoming dental anxiety: Simple tips to make your next dental visit easier

Avoiding dental visits just because they feel stressful or even scary is not the answer. Problems such as tooth decay (caries), gum disease, and other dental problems can worsen, leading to more extensive and painful procedures in the future.

If you find yourself nervous about dental visits, you are not alone. Dental anxiety and dentophobia (a more severe fear of the dentist or dental procedures) are common. Still, the good news is that there are ways to overcome these feelings and make your next dental checkup a much better experience. Gradual exposure, relaxation techniques, and open communication with your dental practitioner can significantly help reduce dental anxiety over time.

Here are some practical tips to help reduce dental anxiety and even start enjoying your visits to the dentist.

1. WHAT IS BEHIND YOUR DENTAL FEAR?

The first step in overcoming dental anxiety is understanding what makes you nervous. Is it fear of pain, embarrassment about your teeth, or a bad experience in the past?

Once you know the cause, you can take steps to address it. For example, if you are worried about pain, let your dental practitioner know so they can offer options like numbing gel or gentle techniques. If it's embarrassment, remember that dental practitioners have seen everything and are there to help, not judge.

Sometimes, fear comes from not knowing what to expect. Learning more about dental procedures can help you feel more in control. Ask your dental practitioners to explain the process in simple terms.

2. THE KEY TO A CALM DENTAL EXPERIENCE: FIND THE RIGHT DENTAL PRACTITIONER FOR YOU

Finding a dental practitioner you trust can make all the difference. Look for someone who is known for being patient and understanding. Ask friends or family for recommendations or read reviews online.

3. HONEST CONVERSATIONS LEAD TO BETTER DENTAL VISITS

Communication is key. Let your dental practitioner and team know about your fears before your appointment. Ask your dental practitioner to explain what they are doing step-by-step so there are no surprises.

Many dental practitioners are trained to handle nervous patients and will take extra steps to help you feel comfortable. For example, you can agree on a hand signal to let the dental practitioner know if you need a break during the procedure.

4. THE POWER OF SUPPORT: TAKE AN UNDERSTANDING FRIEND ALONG

Sometimes, having a friend or family member with you can provide extra comfort. They can help keep you calm while you wait and support you during the appointment.

5. RELAXATION TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE ANXIETY

Relaxation techniques can help calm your mind and body before and during your visit. Try these:



Deep breathing

Take slow, deep breaths to reduce stress.



Visualisation

Imagine yourself in a peaceful place, like a beach or garden.



Progressive muscle relaxation

Tense and relax different muscle groups to ease tension.



Bring your headphones

Some people find that listening to calming music or a podcast during the appointment helps distract them and reduce anxiety.

6. CONSIDER SEDATION OPTIONS*

A consultation with your dental practitioner can help determine the best sedation option for your needs, allowing you to undergo necessary treatments without overwhelming anxiety.

1

Local anaesthesia

can ensure that the procedure is pain-free.

2

Inhalation sedation or nitrous oxide (laughing gas)

is a mild sedative that can help you feel relaxed and calm during your visit.

3

For those with severe anxiety,

prescribed oral sedatives can help you feel relaxed and less aware of the procedure.

7. TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME: START WITH A SIMPLE CHECKUP

If it has been a while since your last dental visit, do not feel pressured to jump into a major procedure. Start with a simple checkup or cleaning to ease yourself back into the routine. These visits are usually quick and painless, helping you build confidence for future appointments.

Regular dental visits for children from an early age will not only ensure healthy teeth but also help the child become familiar with treatment in the chair. This will reduce anxiety, allowing the dental healthcare professional to complete the necessary treatment in the rooms and avoid risky treatment later under general anaesthesia.

8. TURN FEAR INTO FUN WITH POST-DENTIST REWARDS

Having something to look forward to can make the experience more positive. Treat yourself to something enjoyable after your appointment as a reward for facing fear. However, if you plan to eat or drink something, always ask your dental healthcare professional how long you will need to wait after the treatment. Instead, plan a relaxing activity or watch a movie.

9. THINK POSITIVE: REMIND YOURSELF WHY DENTAL VISITS ARE WORTH IT

Taking care of your teeth is an investment in your overall wellbeing. A clean, healthy smile not only boosts your confidence, but along with other good oral hygiene habits, regular dental visits will help prevent the development of tooth decay (caries) or gum disease.

10. GOOD ORAL HYGIENE HABITS AT HOME

In addition to regular dental visits, follow good oral hygiene habits to enhance your overall dental health and reduce anxiety related to potential issues.



Make it a habit to rinse your mouth with water after every meal or snack.



Limit sweets, sugary foods, and sugar-filled drinks – make water your main drink.



Brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste for two minutes every morning and every night. Use a small to medium-sized soft-bristled toothbrush.



After brushing your teeth at night, do not eat or drink anything other than water before you go to bed.



Floss to clean between your teeth. Do this once daily or, at a minimum, three times a week.

***Moderate/deep sedation in the dental rooms:** It is important to note that the benefit of moderate/deep sedation in the dental rooms is limited to pre-authorised extensive dental treatment and removal of impacted teeth only.

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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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BE A SWEET SUPPORT FOR YOUR LOVED ONE LIVING WITH DIABETES

OVER
4 million

South Africans live with diabetes, a chronic condition characterised by high blood sugar.

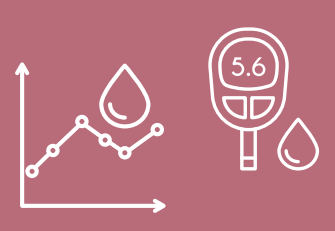


It can be a complex condition to manage, involving medicine, regular checks and changes in diet and exercise, so your loved one will benefit from a bit of help.

You can support your loved one in the following ways:

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Learn about diabetes, its complications, management strategies and blood sugar monitoring. You can learn more about diabetes by asking your loved one questions, offering to join appointments with their doctor and reading clinical pamphlets. If you go online, stick to reputable websites like the World Health Organization.



ENCOURAGE HEALTHY EATING

A balanced diet is one of the cornerstones of effective diabetes management.

Assist by:



Offering support in their journey to be healthier and letting them know you are there for them



Cooking nutritious meals together



Making similar choices when eating out together to encourage healthier choices

EXERCISE TOGETHER

Because exercise helps to regulate blood sugar levels, suggest activities you can do together, such as walking, swimming, or even a dance class.



UNDERSTAND THEIR TREATMENT PLAN

Taking their medicine is vital. Offer gentle reminders and assistance tracking their blood sugar readings and following their healthcare practitioner's guidelines.



KNOW WHAT TO DO IN A DIABETIC EMERGENCY

This can occur when blood sugar levels are either too high or too low. Recognising the signs and knowing how to respond is essential, as this can prevent complications and save your loved one's life.

Speak to your loved one about what to do in an emergency, and get a second opinion from a healthcare practitioner.



OFFER EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

A diabetes diagnosis can be a shock, and managing the condition can be overwhelming at times. As those living with diabetes are two to three times more likely to experience depression than those without diabetes, providing a listening ear and words of encouragement can remind your loved one that they're not alone on their journey.

Diabetes is a manageable condition, but it can be demanding. With support and encouragement, those living with diabetes will navigate their daily challenges a little more sweetly.

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