POLMED
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YOUR CARE POLMED

September 2025

"When women take care of their health, they become their own best friend."

Maya Angelou

Dear POLMED Member,

Spring signals a season of renewal and fresh beginnings, a reminder to focus on health and prevention as much as growth and change. In this spirit, September is recognised as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, drawing attention to one of the most preventable yet serious cancers affecting women.

Through regular screenings, HPV vaccination, and education, the risks can be significantly reduced. Early detection remains the strongest safeguard. You can read more in our feature article: *Pap smears and HPV vaccines: Let's talk cervical cancer.*

This month, we also highlight the importance of protecting your vision with an article on how diabetes can affect eye health.

Finally, September marks World Heart Day, raising awareness about preventing and managing cardiovascular disease. Explore our article below for practical steps to keep your heart healthy.

Let's take a proactive step towards safeguarding our health!

Yours in health,
The YourCare Team

In this issue...

DIABETES AND YOUR EYES

One of the key messages of Eye Care Awareness Month is to highlight how high blood sugar can damage the blood vessels and nerves in the eyes, which can lead to diabetic eye diseases, including diabetic retinopathy and diabetic macular oedema (DME).

READ MORE...

MATTERS OF THE HEART: PROTECT YOURS THIS WORLD HEART DAY

Observed in September, World Heart Day is a global initiative aimed at raising awareness about preventing and managing cardiovascular diseases (CVDs)— the leading cause of death worldwide —and promoting heart health.

READ MORE...

PAP SMEARS AND HPV VACCINES: LET'S TALK CERVICAL CANCER

Cervical cancer is the 2nd most common cancer amongst South African women and it's the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in our female population.

READ MORE...

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Diabetes and your eyes

Protect your vision: keep your eyes on blood sugar levels

Diabetes affects around

7.2% of South Africans.

TYPE 1 DIABETES TYPE 2 DIABETES

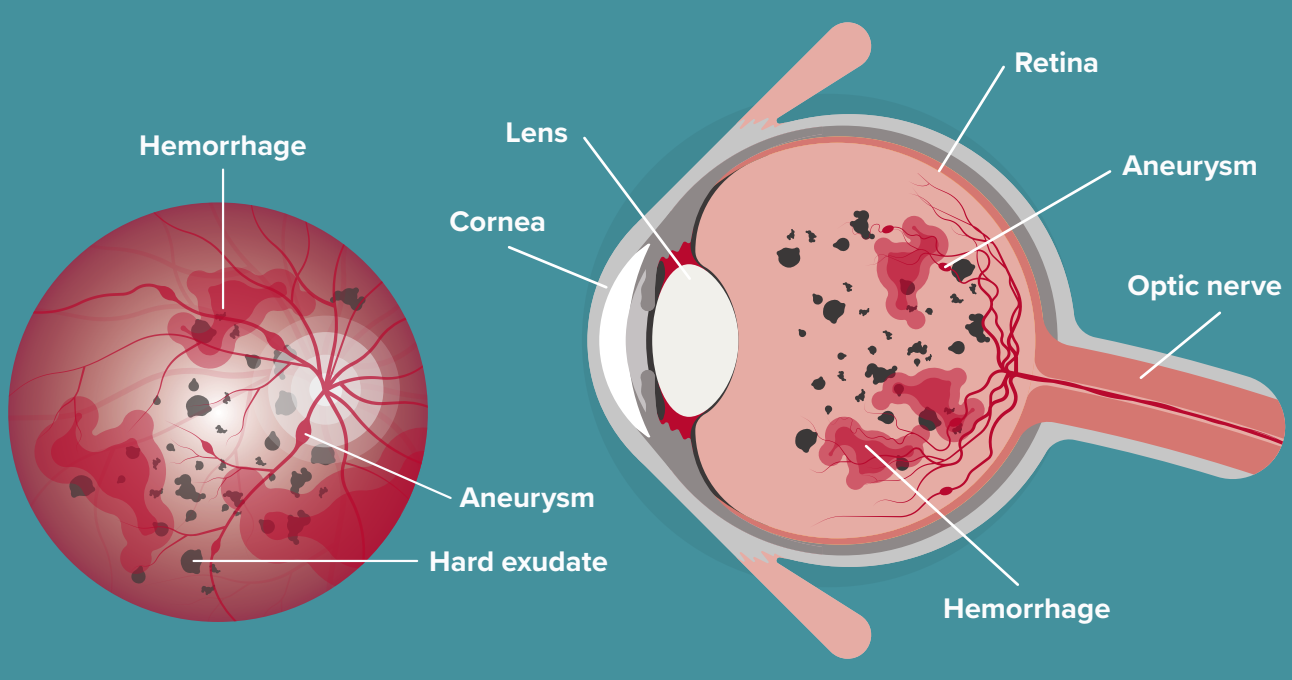
Poorly managed, it can impact many body parts – including the eyes.

One of the key messages of **Eye Care Awareness Month** is to **highlight how high blood sugar can damage the blood vessels and nerves in the eyes**, which can lead to diabetic eye diseases, including **diabetic retinopathy** and **diabetic macular oedema (DME)**.

WHAT ARE THESE KEY CONDITIONS?

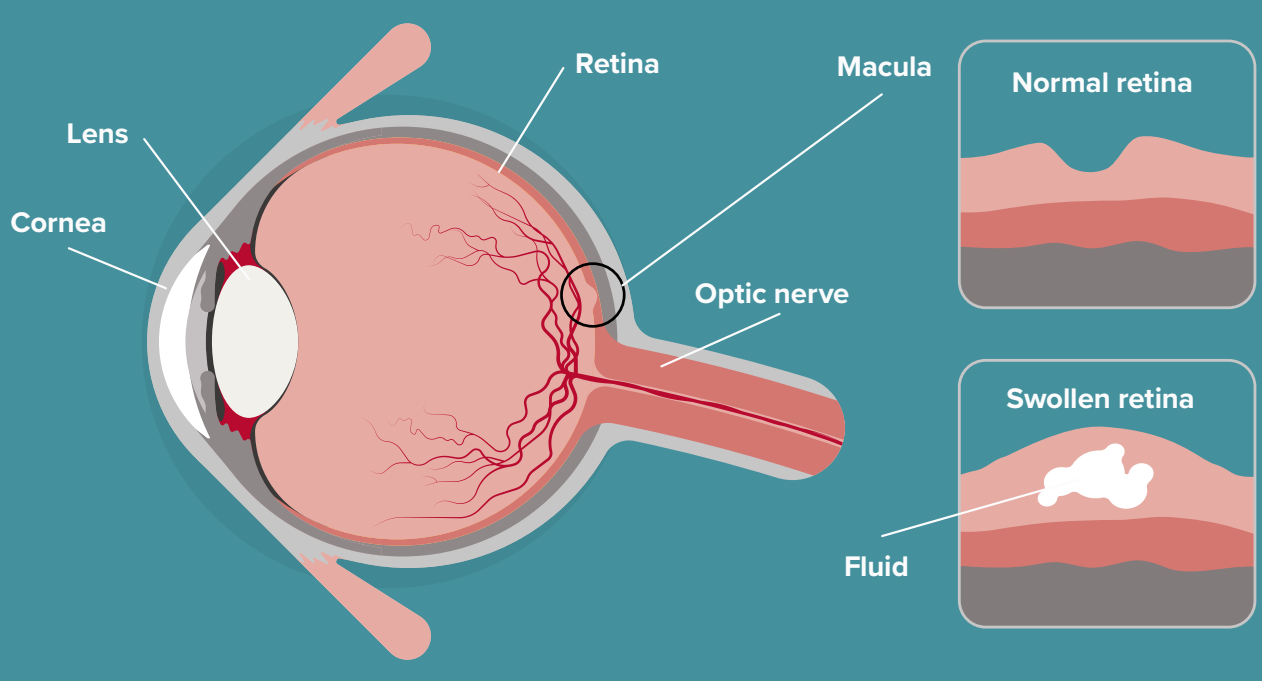
Diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is the leading **cause of blindness in South Africa**. The condition appears when **high blood sugar levels damage the tiny blood vessels in the retina.**



Diabetic macular oedema

DME affects around **12-20%** of South Africans living with diabetes. It develops when **fluid builds up in the macula** – the part of the retina **responsible for clear and central vision.**



KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THESE SIGNS

The symptoms of diabetic eye disease include:

- Blurry, wavy or distorted vision
- Floaters, which look like tiny specks or strings floating across your field of vision
- Difficulty distinguishing colours
- Dark spots or shadows in central or peripheral (side) vision
- Trouble seeing in low light or at night

EARLY SCREENING CAN SAVE YOUR SIGHT

Even if you don't have symptoms, **having an eye test at least once a year is important**. Regular screening allows early detection of changes in the eyes. It allows for early intervention, thus preventing permanent vision loss.

As a POLMED member, you have access to free screening under the Preventive Screening Benefit, which includes blood glucose checks for diabetes. You're also covered for annual eye tests as part of your benefits.

This Eye Care Awareness Month, let's commit to protecting our vision, whether we live with diabetes or not.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can register for support and management of diabetes.

Contact details:
POLMED Disease Risk Management Programme
Tel: **0860765633** | Email: **polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za**

REFERENCES:

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Matters of the heart:
Protect yours this World Heart Day

Observed in September, World Heart Day is a global initiative aimed at raising awareness around preventing and managing cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), the leading cause of death worldwide, and promoting heart health.

Know your risks

Several lifestyle and health factors can increase your risk for heart disease, including:

- A diet high in saturated fats, salt and sugar
- Physical inactivity
- Smoking and tobacco use
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Chronic stress
- Poor sleep habits
- Chronic conditions such as high blood pressure (BP), high cholesterol and diabetes

TAKE ACTION FOR A HEALTHIER HEART

The good news? **Around 80% of cardiovascular diseases are preventable**. Here's how you can take charge of your heart and your health:

Eat smart: Opt for fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, lentils and healthy fats.

Get moving: Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, dancing, or jogging, five times a week.

Quit smoking: Tobacco use is the second leading cause of heart disease, with around 12 million South Africans aged 15 and older currently using tobacco. Support is available through nicotine patches, which can help you kick the habit and protect your heart.

Avoid alcohol: According to the World Health Organization (WHO) no level of alcohol consumption is considered safe for your health.

Monitor your numbers: Regularly monitor your blood pressure (BP), cholesterol and blood sugar levels, as chronic conditions can increase the risk for heart disease.

The call to action is clear this World Heart Day:
"Use Heart for Action". Learn about cardiovascular disease prevention and take meaningful steps to protect your heart, for yourself and those you love.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can register for support and management of heart-related conditions, such as:

- High Blood Pressure
- Hyperlipidaemia
- Heart Failure
- Coronary Artery Disease
- Dysrhythmia

Contact details:
POLMED Disease Risk Management Programme:
0860 765 633 | 0861 113 135 | polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za

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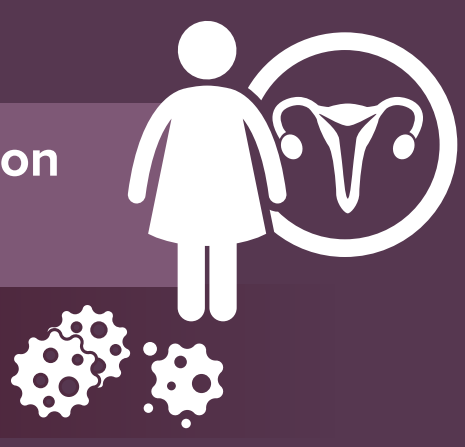
Pap Smears And HPV Vaccines: Let's Talk Cervical Cancer

September is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month.

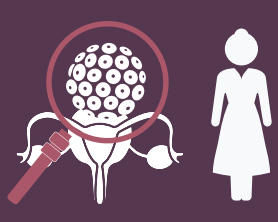


Cervical cancer is the **2nd most common** cancer amongst South African women

and it's the **leading cause of cancer-related deaths in our female population**.

WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

It develops when abnormal cells begin to grow in the cervix lining. **The main cause of cervical cancer is linked to infection with certain strains of human papillomavirus (HPV)**. The virus is spread through sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex. While HPV can spread through skin-to-skin contact in the genital area, it's not spread through casual contact, such as shaking hands or hugging.



95% OF CERVICAL CANCER CASES ARE CAUSED BY HPV, IF LEFT UNTREATED.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

1. Get screened

When diagnosed early through routine screening, **cervical cancer is one of the most treatable forms of cancer.**

Screening can prevent up to 80% of cervical cancers and reduce mortality by at least 80%.

Pap smears are vaginal examinations that check for abnormalities in the cells of the cervix. Women are advised to **have a pap smear every 2 to 3 years from the age of 21 or at any age if they're living with HIV**.

2. Get vaccinated

The HPV vaccine protects the body against the most common strains of the HPV virus. It's advisable for **young girls aged 9 to 14 to be vaccinated before becoming sexually active**, as it can be less effective in older women, especially those who've already been exposed to the virus.

It's still important to go for regular pap smears, irrespective of HPV vaccination.

Cervical Cancer Screening (Pap Smear) – POLMED Benefit Details

Who qualifies?
All female members aged 21 to 64 years, except those who have had a complete hysterectomy with no residual cervix.

Frequency of screening:
Covered once every three years.

Benefit source:
Paid from the Preventative Care Benefit — not deducted from your Out-of-Hospital Benefit .

Tariff code/ICD-10:
Cervical cancer screening is billed under Tariff code 4566 and ICD-10 code Z12.4.

Additional notes:
The benefit is subject to managed care protocols.
HPV screening is also available once every five years for females aged 21 years and older.

Cervical cancer is a largely preventable condition. We can save lives by vaccinating, going for pap smears, and encouraging the women around us to do the same.

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