

YOUR CARE POLMED

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4 health risks for women



With work, children, and maintaining a household, women are always busy. Also, their giving nature often has them prioritising the health and needs of their family and others before their own. Women need to take care of their health just as much as they do others.

1 Diabetes

Diabetes is the leading cause of death in South African women, causing 46% more deaths than HIV.

Additionally, pregnant women face a 25.8% risk of developing gestational diabetes. With gestational diabetes, both mother and child face a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes later on in life.

To help reduce their risk for diabetes, women need to exercise regularly, not smoke and eat a healthy and balanced diet.

Women with diabetes should carefully follow the instructions of their doctor when it comes to prescribed medication and diet.



2 Breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer affecting women in South Africa. 1 in 27 women is at risk of developing breast cancer.

Symptoms include a lump or mass in the breast or the underarm area, swelling of all or part of the breast, skin irritation or dimpling, breast or nipple pain, and nipple discharge.

Remember: With all cancers, early detection is critical. Consult your doctor if you notice anything that concerns you.

Breast self-examination:

- It would be best if you examined your breasts once a month following your menstrual cycle.
- Sit or stand shirtless and braless in front of a mirror with your arms at your sides and look at your breasts.
- Check your breasts for any dimpling or changes in size, shape, or symmetry, and if your nipples are turned in.
- Lay down and use your hands and the pads of your fingers to examine your breasts.
- Use different pressure levels from light pressure to feel the tissue closest to the skin, medium pressure to feel a little deeper, and firm pressure to feel tissue closest to the chest and ribs.
- Your doctor can also perform a clinical breast examination as part of your annual medical check-up.

Mammograms:

Mammograms are an accurate test to detect breast cancer. Women over the age of 50 years should get a mammogram every three years until the age of 70 years if they have an average risk of developing breast cancer. Women may be eligible for breast cancer screening earlier if they have a higher-than-average risk.

Talk with your healthcare provider for guidance about breast cancer screenings. Refer to your member guide, scheme website or contact Polmed on 0860 765 633 for details on Preventative care benefits.



3 Depression and anxiety

Women are twice as likely to suffer from depression than men. They are also two to three times more likely than men to experience panic attacks and twice as likely to experience a generalised anxiety disorder.

Women need to reach out to their doctor, trusted friend, family member, or support groups when battling with their mental health. This is the first step to leading them on the path to better managing their mental health.



4 Gender-based violence

It's estimated that 1 in 5 South African women will experience gender-based violence. In addition to physical and sexual abuse, psychological and verbal abuse are also severe forms of abuse that women experience.

The long-term effects of gender-based violence can include:

- stress
- depression
- anxiety
- heart problems
- compromised immune system

Unfortunately, some women will opt out of visiting their doctor because they don't want anyone to know about the abuse.

If you are a survivor of gender-based violence, you can speak to your doctor for help or call the South African Gender-Based Violence Command Centre on 0800 428 428 (available 24-hours per day). The centre will refer your call directly to police services and social workers who work with survivors of gender-based violence.



Women need to prioritise their health. Women should never feel guilty about taking care of their health as much as they do everyone else's.

References

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- <http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/12654>
- <https://www.diabetessa.org.za/about-diabetes/>

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.