



YOUR BANKMED NEWSLETTER

THIS MONTH, A LITTLE LOVE CAN GO A LONG WAY

What is love when it comes to your overall health status? Like any other “two-way street”, it’s about the relationship you have with yourself. When you give your body the attention it deserves – a little love – your body gives you the chance to live your best life, for longer. This month we’re sharing a few ways you can initiate this important investment in your health and make 2024 the year you fall in love with a happier, healthier YOU.

HOW HEALTHY IS **YOUR** HEART?

Around the world, heart disease is one of the leading causes of death. According to the WHO (World Health Organization), as many as **85% of all global deaths in 2019 were caused by heart attacks or stroke.**



HOW TO RECOGNISE PROBLEMS WITH YOUR HEART HEALTH

Signs and symptoms may vary according to the type of heart disease a person has but, common indicators can include:

- Chest pain or tightness
- Heart palpitations or irregular heartbeat
- Breathlessness / shortness of breath
- Light-headedness
- Fatigue
- Fluid retention or swelling – especially the ankles
- Nausea
- Sweating
- Pain, numbness, weakness or coldness in the arms, legs, jaw, throat, upper belly area or back

WHAT CAN INCREASE YOUR RISK?

- Gender – men are more typically at risk, however a woman's risk can increase after menopause
- Age – older ages are at increased risk of narrowed or damaged arteries, as well as a thickening or weakening of the heart muscle
- Smoking – tobacco can damage arteries
- An unhealthy diet – excessive consumption of fat, salt and sugar, as well as harmful use of alcohol
- Hypertension / high blood pressure – unmanaged or uncontrolled, can cause arteries to thicken and harden
- High cholesterol – increases the risk of a thickening and hardening of arteries
- Diabetes
- Obesity / excess body weight
- Sedentary lifestyle / lack of exercise
- Stress (unrelieved / chronic)
- Family history

I'M TOO YOUNG TO WORRY ABOUT HEART DISEASE, RIGHT?

According to the American Heart Institution the average age of a first heart attack is around 65 years of age for males and 72 for females. However, incidence among younger populations (under 50) has been on the rise for well over a decade already.

Among people under the age of 50, this **2020 study** noted the following about heart attack incidence:

- Those 20 – 29 years of age had an incidence rate of 2.1 per 100,000 people
- Those 30 – 39 years of age increased to 16.9 per 100,000 people
- Those 40 – 49 years of age jumped to 97.6 per 100,000 people

What was concerning was that even though the incidence of heart attacks in those aged 40 – 49 was not significantly high, one in ten of those who did have a heart attack either died or had a second heart-related event later. The same study noted that most individuals who experienced a heart attack by age 45 were male, smokers, obese and had a family history of premature heart problems.

According to the **CDC (Centres of Disease Control and Prevention)**, heart disease prevalence in people aged 18 and over was 6.2% in 2009. By 2020, this increased marginally and was measured at an average 6.3%. The stats are clear, an increase in conditions like high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes and chronic kidney disease among younger people increases the chance of a heart attack. **Drug use, especially cocaine or cannabis, is also prevalent among people under the age of 50** and can also be a contributing factor.





SEVEN WAYS TO LIVE HEART-HEALTHY



01

Know your health history and maintain your health condition today – find out what your family history of heart disease is and keep your overall health in check with regular medical check-ups and screenings every year – especially your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels. Your annual **Personal Health Assessment** will help you keep an eye on these markers.



02

Maintain a nutritious diet – incorporate more fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein meats, fish, healthy fats, and low-fat dairy products. Reducing your intake of salt, added sugar, processed foods and saturated fats will be helpful too. You can also consider substituting sugary drinks for water, limiting, or stopping alcohol consumption altogether, and limiting your daily caffeine intake.



03

Get active – a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise a week or 30 - 60 minutes a day (such as brisk walking) are recommended, as well as activities to strengthen muscles at least twice a week.



04

Quit smoking – non-smokers must also be mindful to stay away from second-hand smoke.



05

Maintain a healthy weight – the middle section of the body is most often the trouble area. Visceral fat can raise your risk of heart conditions.



06

Get quality sleep – a sleep schedule and proper sleep hygiene can help to ensure a full nights' sleep without disruptions.



07

Manage your stress levels – chronic stress can increase the risk of heart-related health problems. 'Emotional eating', smoking / vaping and even consumption of alcohol are harmful ways to "cope" through stressful times. For a good indication of your current stress levels, you can conduct your **Mental Wellbeing Assessment**.





LADIES, ARE THERE GAPS IN YOUR HEALTH ROUTINE?

Often, our health only gets our attention when it's in a poor state but, healthcare routines are more successful from a preventative approach.

In addition to the annual preventative healthcare checks such as dental check-ups, flu vaccinations and **Personal Health Assessments**, women have a few unique, gynaecological health check-ups that are fundamentally important for optimal health.

Three key areas to prioritise include – pap smears, cervical health, and the use of oral contraceptives.

WHEN LAST DID YOU SCHEDULE A PAP SMEAR?

A pap smear is an important part of a woman's health routine.

One of the main reasons this screening is so important for women is the risk of cervical cancer. For many women, symptoms aren't even present at the time of a cervical abnormality or even cancer. Incidence rates of cervical cancer can be traced back to an infection with HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) – in fact HPV is the primary risk factor for the development of cervical cancer.

HERE ARE SOME REASONS WHY SKIPPING YOUR ANNUAL PAP SMEAR IS NOT A GOOD IDEA:

- The procedure can help detect the presence of HPV, which is commonly contracted through sexual contact
- It can help with early detection of abnormal changes at a cellular level for precancerous lesions
- It can detect all types of infections that may be present, or even developing, at the time of the procedure
- Women using oral contraceptives for a prolonged period can also be at increased risk of cervical cancer, so regular screenings should be scheduled (once a year)

WHY THE HPV VACCINE IS RELEVANT AS A PREVENTION METHOD?

The HPV vaccine is a key preventative measure, however, there are a few things to take note of:

- Children can receive the vaccine between the ages of 9 and 25. Two doses are typically required, administered 6 - 12 months apart. After the age of 15, three doses are recommended over a 6-month period.
- Teens and young adults should also consider getting the vaccine before the age of 25. It is best to follow the guidance of your gynaecologist for how best to go about this safely.
 - Risk for teenage girls can reduce up to 88%
 - Risk for young adult women can reduce up to 81%
- The vaccination is not typically recommended after the age of 25, as it has been shown to provide less benefit in cervical cancer prevention. Typically, older adults tend to already have an HPV infection from 26 years of age once they've become sexually active. **If a woman is vaccinated by this age, her risk drops by about 40%.**

As a Bankmed member, you can book a pap smear and HPV vaccination at any Clicks, Dis-chem or Alpha Pharm onsite clinic **here**.

Additionally, Active **Balance** members can also earn 1,000 Balance points for receiving their HPV vaccine, as well as 2,500 points annually for getting a pap smear (*if aged between 25 and 65).





DO YOU USE ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES?

Also known as birth control pills or the pill, oral contraceptives are commonly used for pregnancy prevention. There are, however, other important **health-related reasons women can use oral contraceptives:**

- Control irregular menstrual periods
- Reduce problems with cramps, PMS (premenstrual syndrome), PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder) and anaemia (iron-deficiency)
- Relieve symptoms associated with endometriosis, such as painful periods and menstrual cramps
- Prevention of ovarian cysts and fibroids
- Relieve hormonal imbalances and symptoms associated with oral contraceptives (polycystic ovarian syndrome)

As a Bankmed member, you can have your monthly oral contraceptives supply delivered straight to your door. Learn more about how to register and order your prescription pill packs online, using our *Pill Squad Programme*.

WHAT IS A PERSONAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT?

We've all had that moment of shock where a friend, colleague or family member is diagnosed with a serious illness, and we think, "But they look so healthy!" Unfortunately, a healthy appearance can sometimes mask some less-healthy conditions happening inside of us. Most of these are easily treatable, but it's important that you're aware of your health status, to obtain appropriate support and treatment where necessary. An early diagnosis helps prevent severe illness and avoids costly and invasive interventions.

Bankmed offers you a variety of preventative health screenings and these are covered as part of your benefits, so you don't have to dip into your savings.

SCREENINGS

Three important annual tests that everyone should prioritise, regardless of age or gender are:

- **Personal Health Assessment (PHA)**
- **HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT)**
- **Mental Wellbeing Assessment**

IMPROVE YOUR BALANCE STATUS

Conducting your health screenings will not only help improve your wellbeing but it can significantly boost your Balance status too by earning you thousands of points.

- Personal Health Assessment: up to 22,500 points, depending on results. Assess your blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol, weight, and smoking status
- HIV counselling and testing for members 18 years or older: 7,500 points for the first test and 1,000 points, once a year thereafter
- Online mental wellbeing assessments: 1,000 points (500 points twice a year)

So be sure to **get activated** for Balance and Active Rewards if you aren't already!



READY TO BOOK YOUR SCREENING?

Make your appointment at a Clicks, Dis-Chem or Alpha Pharm pharmacy **online**. If you need any assistance with your online booking, you can e-mail support@recomed.co.za

If you'd prefer to have your screening at home, you can schedule an appointment by:

- Calling BioFITT Wellness (our screening partner) on 021 820 4858 between 08:00 – 17:00 on weekdays
- Using the dedicated WhatsApp line on 081 848 8938 (provide your name, membership number and physical address)

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED

If your screening results indicate that you are at risk for an underlying condition, it is important that you visit your Healthcare Professional to confirm the results. If they diagnose you with a chronic condition, you should enrol into the appropriate Managed Care Programme to access the Chronic Illness Benefit for treatment, to ensure you don't deplete your benefits or savings.

Read more about which 27 chronic conditions are covered and how to register for the Chronic Illness Benefit or contact us on 0800 BANKMED (0800 226 5633).





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