Prevention is Better than Cure!

We cannot deny the long term effects of adopting and implementing behaviours that echoes the classic and age old saying that “Prevention is better than cure”.

We should be investing time in our wellbeing because our health is our true wealth!

In our on-going effort to educate our clients on a range of healthcare and wellness topics, we highlight practical steps we can all take to preserve our health or become healthier, especially as we’re gearing up to Winter.

Screening

The prevention, in the form of tests and screenings, is not only better; it’s also more cost effective. It is best to have regular health checks and screenings. More and more medical schemes are starting to pay for screening tests out of your risk benefit and not your savings.

Tests that are covered include:

- Screening
  - Checks for cholesterol, blood sugar, blood glucose and healthy weight
  - Prostate, glaucoma, TB, HIV/Aids, mammograms and pap smears.
- Vaccinations
  - for flu and
  - standard child vaccinations and some medical schemes cover
  - HPV vaccine to prevent cervical cancer

Speak to your Aon Hewitt Healthcare Consultant our Aon Resolution Centre (ARC) if you want to know more about the screening benefits your medical scheme offers.

Preventive screening is crucial to ensure early detection of a medical condition, so that you and your healthcare professional can plan the best care for you.
Reduce Health Risks

Apart from screening there are also practical steps we can take to strengthen our immune systems, make our bodies stronger to effectively fight off, infections and diseases.

The list of things you can do to reduce your health risks is endless but for the purpose of this Alert, we focus on 5 that support each other:

1. Get the flu jab
2. Wash your hands
3. Follow good nutrition
4. Stay hydrated
5. Keep moving

Communicable diseases like colds and flu are highly contagious and have no cure other than to run their course, your best bet is to prevent becoming ill in the first place. Even if you do get sick this season, the severity and length of illness is dependent on the strength of your immune system and your body’s ability to fight off the virus.

Get the flu jab in April

A vaccine is a biological preparation that improves immunity to a particular disease. A vaccine typically contains an agent that resembles a disease-causing microorganism, and is often made from weakened or killed forms of the microbe, its toxins or one of its surface proteins. The agent stimulates the body’s immune system to recognize the agent as foreign, destroy it, and “remember” it, so that the immune system can more easily recognize and destroy any of these microorganisms that it later encounters.

Having a flu vaccination every year is your best protection against the flu – the vaccination decreases your chance of catching flu by up to 80%! You can get it at your GP, most clinics and many pharmacies offer the flu jab. If your local pharmacy has a clinic, make an appointment to see the clinic sister. You can also contact your Employee Wellbeing Programme should you require help and advice on where to go.

Why should you have a flu vaccination?

Seasonal flu season runs from as early as May to as late as September, throughout winter. During this time flu viruses are circulating. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others.

When more people get vaccinated against the flu then less flu can spread through schools, communities and workplaces.

When should you get a flu vaccination?

It is best to have the vaccination before the end of April. The earlier you have it, the more time that your immune system has to build up immunity. You can still have the vaccination anytime during winter.

How does the flu vaccine work?

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against the neutralised flu viruses that are in the vaccine – these viruses change each year based on international surveillance and on scientists’ estimates about which types and strains of viruses will circulate in a given year.

Who should get the vaccination?

Anyone can get the flu jab but it is advised for at-risk populations including:

- People 65 years and older.
- People who are at high risk of developing serious complications such as pneumonia; those with medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, HIV infection, cancer, chronic lung disease and organ transplant patients.
- Pregnant women; consult your doctor first.
- People who live with or care for others who are at high risk of developing serious complications – those with medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, HIV infection and chronic lung disease.
- People who work in an open-plan environment where germs and viruses can circulate freely.
If you are allergic to egg white, are in your first trimester of pregnancy, or have had a bad reaction to any vaccine in the past then consult your doctor before you get your flu jab.

**Take Action**: Taking vitamin C every day (up to 1000 mg – per adult) may protect you against the flu and help you recover faster

**Note**: Children from the age of six months old can be vaccinated. If you have children at crèche, pre-primary or primary school then it is best to get them vaccinated as viruses spread rapidly in younger children.

**Does the flu jab have side-effects?**

Some people may experience flu-like symptoms, sore muscles, malaise and possibly a low-grade fever after the vaccination. In most cases these symptoms disappear within 48 hours without treatment. Some may also experience slight discomfort on the arm where the jab was given.

**Wash your hands**

Washing your hands is the best way to stop germs from spreading. Hand-washing requires only soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer — a cleanser that doesn't require water.

**When to wash your hands**

As you touch people, surfaces and objects throughout the day, you accumulate germs on your hands. In turn, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Although it's impossible to keep your hands germ-free, washing your hands frequently can help limit the transfer of bacteria, viruses and other microbes.

In addition, wash your hands whenever they look dirty.

**How to wash your hands**

It's generally best to wash your hands with soap and water. Keep in mind that antibacterial soap is no more effective at killing germs than is regular soap. Using antibacterial soap might even lead to the development of bacteria that are resistant to the product's antimicrobial agents — making it harder to kill these germs in the future. Hand-washing doesn't take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness. Adopting this simple habit can play a major role in protecting your health and staying healthy.

**Nutrition**

What we put into our bodies in the form of nutrients plays a big role in strengthening our immune. Your ability to interact with the world around you and remain healthy is dependent to a large extent on the healthy functioning of your immune system. Your immune system is responsible for fighting germs and viruses, and also for destroying cells within your body when they become cancerous.

- **Good nutrition** means getting the right amount of nutrients from healthy foods in the right combinations. Having nutrition knowledge and making smart choices about the foods you eat can and will help you achieve optimum health over your lifetime, and be a key to avoiding obesity, illness, and many of today's most prevalent chronic diseases. Nutrition is just one key to developing and maintaining good health. Good health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being — a healthy mind, body, and spirit.

- **Poor nutrition** has been shown to result in increased infections, to slow healing from injury and infections, and to increase susceptibility to symptoms and complications from immune system dysfunction. Science has shown that immune function often decreases as we age, and recent research suggests this decrease is also related to nutrition and may be slowed or even stopped by maintaining healthy nutrition.

World Health Day is celebrated on 7 April to mark the founding of World Health Organisation and the theme for 2015 is food safety.
This is an opportunity to alert people working in different government sectors, farmers, manufacturers, retailers, restaurants, health practitioners – as well as consumers – about the importance of food safety, and the part each can play in ensuring that everyone can feel confident that the food on their plate is safe to eat.

Food safety is a shared responsibility. It is important to work all along the food production chain – from farmers and manufacturers to vendors and consumers.

Stay Hydrated

Water makes up about 60 percent of your body weight. Every system in your body depends on water. For example, water flushes toxins out of vital organs, carries nutrients to your cells, and provides a moist environment for ear, nose and throat tissues. Lack of water can lead to dehydration, a condition that occurs when you don't have enough water in your body to carry out normal functions. Even mild dehydration can drain your energy and make you tired.

Replacing high-calorie sodas or alcoholic drinks with plain water can help control appetite and weight, improve sleep and energy levels reduce the likelihood of dental cavities or tooth decay, and help manage chronic conditions such as diabetes mellitus. If you would like to increase your water intake for athletic, dietary, or health purposes, there are many safe and effective ways to do so.

Generally, if you drink enough fluid so that you rarely feel thirsty and your urine is colorless or light yellow — and measures about 6.3 cups (1.5 liters) or more a day if you were to keep track — your fluid intake is probably adequate. If you're concerned about your fluid intake or have health issues, check with your doctor or a registered dietitian. He or she can help you determine the amount of water that's right for you.

To ward off dehydration and make sure your body has the fluids it needs, make water your beverage of choice. Drink a glass of water or other calorie-free or low-calorie beverage with each meal and between each meal and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Get moving

There is a wealth of scientific evidence to show that physical activity is good for your health and can improve your quality of life. Sports scientist Gavin Ray says the human body is designed to move – our muscles, heart, posture and skeletal structure are all designed for movement. "The modern lifestyle is more inactive than in the past," he says. "When the energy from the food we eat doesn’t get used, it gets stored for later use and this leads to weight gain and other lifestyle diseases."

Regular exercise will not only burn excess fat and keep your body weight regular, it can also reduce your risk for major illnesses like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and even some cancers. Frequent exercise improves good cholesterol, the high-density lipoprotein (HDL), and decreases unhealthy triglycerides.

While mild exercise can help boost your immune system, you may want to be gentle on yourself if you already have the flu. That's when it's time to listen to your body, and give it time to recover. Rest your body when you have the flu. Allow your body a chance to adjust to the stress of illness. Your immune system functions best when it is not stressed or in overdrive.

Building exercise into a busy schedule

“We should get a minimum of 150 minutes of low impact of cardiovascular exercise every week,” explains Gavin; “Although this can be split between cardiovascular and resistance training.” The secret is to find an exercise or physical activity you enjoy and build it into your routine. “Questions are often asked about accumulating 30 minutes of exercise through the day can make a difference,” says Gavin. “For example, 10 minutes here or five minutes there and the answer is yes, these small bites of exercise can make a difference.”
Be mindful of getting more exercise. It doesn’t have to be sweaty, difficult or challenging – just get moving!

- Consider getting up a little earlier and doing 20 minutes of exercise. This gets it done for the day and you’ll soon feel more energised as your fitness increases.
- If you’re a night owl, take your 20 minutes at the end of the day when the children are in bed and the chores are done for the day.
- Can’t miss your favourite show? Ride a stationary bicycle at low intensity during the show. Even five to 10 minutes on the bicycle at high intensity will benefit your health. Remember to warm up before you ride.
- If you don’t have a bicycle, get a pair of dumbbells and do as many reps as you can during the commercial breaks. This will strengthen your arms and shoulders.
- How far do you live from work? Can you ditch your car and bicycle or walk to work every other day?
- Walk during your lunch hour or with the children or your dog when you get home. It’s a great way to unwind after a stressful day.
- Find ways to sneak movement into your day. For example, do you take a call on your cell phone at your desk? Could you take the phone into a hallway or passage and walk as you chat? This could add up to 10 or 15 minutes of extra movement into your day.
- If you aren’t able to commit to daily sessions, use your weekends. Two 60 minute sessions on Saturday and Sunday, with a half hour session during the week will make up your 150 minutes.

Sources: Aon Elevate Being, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and WikiHow.

In conclusion

Aon supports medical schemes’ efforts in contributing to their members’ health. When you know better, you do better, and by offering their members benefits for preventative checks they empower them. Medical schemes further assist their members by providing education, advice and support from qualified professionals on disease management and preventative care.

General health checks involve a contact between a person and a healthcare professional to identify signs, symptoms, or risk factors for disease that were previously unrecognised. The findings from preventative checks are extremely important because this will help your healthcare professional to make specific health recommendations for you.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this topic and urge you to share your views.

Be healthy over the Easter weekend and drive safe!

Please feel free to contact your Aon Hewitt Healthcare Consultant if you have any concerns. You may also contact the Aon Resolution Centre (ARC) on 0860 835 272 or e-mail: arc@aon.co.za for further information.

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