



NEWSLETTER 3<sup>rd</sup>  
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# CANCER SCREENING

## Has COVID-19 impacted cancer screening?

This question comes to mind because, over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there's been a global trend and a decline in people sticking to routine and scheduled cancer screening checks for common cancers like breast, cervical, and colon cancers.

Dr Noluthando Nematswerani, Head of Discovery Health's Centre for Clinical Excellence says, "This global trend - which we also see play out among members of medical schemes administered by Discovery Health - is really concerning."

It's so important to catch the very first warning signs of cancer. Here's why.

Dr Nematswerani explains: "Cancer progresses. So it is classified in stages. Earlier and more localised disease is more amenable to complete removal and to the patient's long-term survival."

"Missed cancer screening checks mean a missed opportunity to catch any signs of cancer as early as possible. Routine cancer screening is therefore very important in catching cancers early on and also in allowing for timely management."

Louise Turner, Chief Operations Officer at the Breast Health Foundation adds, "Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers in women worldwide. In fact, in South Africa, the prevalence is high, with 1 in 28 women at risk of breast cancer. We saw women presenting with severe and advanced breast cancers in 2021, due to a lack of cancer screening in 2020. All in all, early detection saves lives."

According to the Breast Health Foundation (South Africa), "It is estimated that South Africa has the highest incidence of male breast cancer in the world with 1-3% of breast cancer cases diagnosed in South Africa occurring in men. It is estimated that up to 400 cases of male breast cancer cases were diagnosed in South Africa during 2018."

### ***What's prevented people from sticking to their scheduled cancer screening checks over the course of the pandemic?***

"Contributing factors include stay-at-home orders and movement restrictions that have impacted people's likelihood of seeing their doctor," says Dr Nematswerani. "Then we have possible screening site closures or temporary suspension of cancer screening services at times, all due to prioritisation of COVID-19 services."



# CANCER SCREENING

## Screening tests - what, when and how often?

Routine screening tests are scheduled at specific time intervals depending on one's cancer risk profile.

### SCREENING FOR PROSTATE CANCER:

Caught in its early stages, whilst still confined to the prostate gland, prostate cancer can be cured. CANSA recommends that men over age 50, or age 40 with a family history of prostate cancer, should talk to a doctor about testing for prostate cancer as part of their health check-up.

The best available ways to detect the presence of prostate cancer is by:

- Doing a prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test
- Digital rectal examination (DRE) and subsequent prostate biopsy

## SCREENING FOR BREAST CANCER:

- If you have no family history of breast cancer you should start having mammograms or breast ultrasounds from the age of 40 and have them every two years.
- If you have a family history of breast cancer, start your screening tests when you are ten years younger than the person who had cancer in your family was, when they were diagnosed. Annual screening tests are recommended.
- Breast MRIs and genetic screening are also appropriate in certain cases and your healthcare provider can advise you here.

## SCREENING FOR CERVICAL CANCER:

- If you are not considered at high risk of cervical cancer, then Pap smears are recommended every three years and HPV screening every five years. It is recommended that screening should start from age 25.
  - Keep in mind that a Pap smear looks for precancerous cells that might become cervical cancer if not treated. An HPV (human papillomavirus) test is used to check for the type of HPV that can lead to cervical cancer.
- Annual Pap smears are recommended for those who are at high risk (such as people living with HIV). So too is HPV screening, every three years.

## SCREENING FOR COLORECTAL CANCER:

- Stool-based tests are recommended every two years as a general screening tool. And, colonoscopy is recommended for those at high-risk of developing this cancer such as those with a strong family history of colorectal cancer or living with medical conditions that increase the risk of colorectal cancer.

## Screening for cancer is key to preventing late-stage cancer

“It’s incredibly important to ensure that everyone who is eligible for cancer screening sets up time to drop in at their screening centre or see their health provider as soon as is possible,” adds Dr Nematswerani. “Available screening tests can detect cancers even where people have no signs or symptoms of disease, so sticking to routine screening checks ensures we have access to this life-saving technology on a regular basis.”

***“The take-home message in this discussion is that regular cancer screening is so important. Short delays in accessing cancer screening are perhaps possible to accept, but long delays are really not acceptable.”***

***In supporting members of TFGMAS in their fight against cancer, the Scheme makes available to members a mammogram or ultrasound of the breast every two years, a Pap smear once every three years or an HPV test once every 5 years, PSA test (prostate screening) each year and bowel cancer screening tests every 2 years for members between 45 and 75 years.***

# SINUSITIS, THE COMMON COLD AND **INFLUENZA**

Suffering from respiratory issues but not sure why? Here's a handy guide to understand the difference between common conditions that affect the health of your airways.



Respiratory problems are a symptom of all kinds of medical conditions, such as the common cold, influenza, allergic rhinitis and sinusitis, so it's no wonder that these conditions are sometimes confused. Here are some ways to help tell the difference:

MEDICAL CONDITION	WHAT IS IT?	SYMPTOMS	DIAGNOSIS	TREATMENT
<b>The common cold</b>	Colds are upper airway infections caused by viruses that are passed from person to person through direct contact with infected secretions or by inhaling infected droplets.	Symptoms include a runny nose or a congested nose, sneezing, a sore throat, a cough, and headaches.	Colds are short-lived and most people recover in a week or two.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over-the-counter meds to relieve symptoms.</li> <li>Antibiotics if prescribed by a doctor.</li> <li>Visit your GP if you develop a high fever, have significantly swollen glands and severe facial pain in the sinuses.</li> </ul>
<b>Sinusitis</b>	Sinusitis is the inflammation (swelling) of the lining of paranasal sinuses.	Classic symptoms are nasal congestion, greenish nasal discharge, facial or dental pain, eye pain, headache, and a night-time cough. Fever, malaise (feeling ill), bad breath, and a sore throat	Develops after catching a cold which doesn't improve, or worsens after 5 to 7 days. Presents as the symptoms above in a milder form, but usually persists for longer than 8 weeks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drinking plenty of fluids</li> <li>Long periods of rest</li> <li>Steaming, using a humidifier</li> <li>Antibiotics</li> <li>Over the counter medications prescribed by your GP.</li> </ul>
<b>The flu</b>	Influenza is a viral infection characterised by fever, fatigue, a flushed face, body aches and head pain - for some, even dizziness or vomiting. The fever usually lasts for a day or 2, up to 5	'Whole body' symptoms usually lessen after day 2 to 4, and respiratory symptoms increase. Respiratory tract symptoms include sore throat, bronchitis, pneumonia and a dry cough.	Diagnosed based on the symptoms and season. Nose and throat swabs can be used to test for the Influenza virus (done at your doctor's discretion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Symptom relief medications as prescribed by your GP</li> </ul>
<b>Allergies</b>	An allergy is an immune system reaction to a typically harmless substance	Includes sneezing, watery eyes, itchy eyes that last more than 10 days without a fever; repeated ear and sinus infections; loss of smell or taste; frequent throat clearing, hoarseness, coughing, or wheezing; dark circles under the eyes caused by increased blood flow near the sinuses.	Skin tests where a drop of a suspected allergen is pricked on the surface of the skin of your back or forearm. The spot will turn red and swell if you are allergic to it. Allergists may request blood tests to diagnose allergies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult an allergist (ask your GP for a referral).</li> <li>Identifying and then avoiding the triggering substance</li> </ul>

***“Remember that good nutrition, regular physical activity and enough good quality sleep when you are healthy does wonders in building up a strong immune system - which will keep you in good stead when the winter season and all its common illnesses roll round,” says Dr Noluthando Nematswerani, Head of the Centre for Clinical Excellence at Discovery Health.***

***“Don’t underestimate the effect of maintaining a healthy lifestyle - and if you get ill, take the time to recover completely before you return to work and daily routines.”***

# WORLD AIDS DAY

## 2022

**This World Aids Day, that took place on 1 December 2022, served as a reminder to think about the steps we can take to stop the spread of sexually transmitted infections, specifically HIV.**

### What can you do?

Everyone can help by knowing their HIV status. Research shows that 90% of people living with HIV know they have the virus. To protect yourself and your family, we recommend all adults get tested for HIV once a year as part of your annual health check.

If a test confirms that you are HIV positive, you or your healthcare provider must register you with the HIVCare Programme as soon as possible. Their skilled, professional consultants respect your right to privacy and will help you get access to clinically sound and cost-effective treatment for your individual needs. Please be assured that we treat each case with complete confidentiality unless you provide consent to share your status with anyone. However, getting cover and support for managing HIV doesn't mean giving up your privacy

### Benefits of the HIVCare Programme

The HIVCare Programme, our HIV management programme, offers the following benefits:

- Medicine to treat HIV\* and vitamins for the immune system
- Regular monitoring
- Monitoring of the patient's response to therapy and tests to pick up side effects
- Continued patient support through dedicated counsellors
- Assistance in finding a registered counsellor for emotional support.

\* This includes medicine to prevent mother-to-child transmission and infection after sexual assault or needle-stick injury.

### To register please contact the HIVCare team:

You need to register on the TFG Medical Aid Scheme HIVCare Programme to access the comprehensive benefits available on the HIVCare Programme.

- Call us on 0860 123 077
- Email [HIV\\_Diseasemanagement@discovery.co.za](mailto:HIV_Diseasemanagement@discovery.co.za)



The HIVCare team will only speak to you as the patient or your treating doctor about any HIV-related query.

# HEALTHY HOLIDAYS



**The December holidays are notorious for derailing fitness goals – but don’t let being far from your usual gym or local parkrun get the better of you. Try an exercise session first thing in the morning – that way social commitments or the fatigue of being on holiday won’t get in the way of your training.**

Don’t overdo it though! Mari Leach, a biokineticist, has this advice: “Now that you suddenly have more time on your hands, be careful of doing too much too soon. This could result in an injury, and discomfort is no way to spend the rest of your holidays. If you plan to start running, try to alternate your running days with a lower impact activity, such as walking, strength training or cycling.”

Remember to use sunscreen regularly and hydrate well. If you happen to have one drink too many the night before, the best cure for that hangover is a good sweat session, lots of water and a healthy balanced meal afterwards!

**Here are some ideas and exercises you can do while on holiday:**

## By the sea

- You’re entitled to spend some time lying face down on a beach towel – but don’t stay down all day! Go for a brisk walk and try some beach volleyball or active water sports like swimming and surfing.
- If you’re keen for some fresh sea air on your run, stick to a boardwalk or solid ground, says Leach. “Walking along the beach is great exercise for your feet, but running on sand can result in injuries such as calf strains, plantar fasciitis and Achilles tendinitis.”

## Travelling and on land

- A skipping rope is small, light and easy to pack, so you can pull it out anywhere to get a quick bout of cardio in.

- If you’re a passenger on a long car or plane trip, try a few small exercises in your seat to get your circulation going. These could include clenching your butt and glutes, neck and ankle rolls, lengthening your spine and arms, twisting from side to side at your hips, and lifting your heels up and down. Do at least 20 repetitions of each, every hour, if you can.
- Hiking is a wonderful way to enjoy the view. Make sure you wear suitable footwear to protect your feet and joints on the uneven ground.
- If you have enough friends or family around, rope them all into playing a team sport. It’s easy to use a ball and/or bat for a makeshift game of soccer, cricket, rugby or baseball.

## At home

Enjoying the peace and quiet of a staycation? Here’s how to stay active from the comfort of your home:

- Be active while watching TV – do strength exercises with hand weights or elastic stretch bands, ride a stationary bike or stretch while watching your favourite show. You can even use a chair for tricep dips and a gym ball for small crunches.
- Volunteer to help anyone you know who’s going away and needs a dog-sitter. This way you can enjoy a walk or run and some fresh air at a nearby park or field at least once or twice a day.
- Make household chores count – mop the floor, scrub the bathtub, wash your car or mow the lawn to get your heart pumping and strengthen your muscles.
- There’s nothing like a little karaoke to bring out the nostalgia over Christmas time. If you can’t hold a tune, put the music up and dance your heart out. Try different genres – from salsa to kwaito to Bollywood to K-pop – each one will get you moving at a different pace and inspire different dance styles and movements from you.

The Board of Trustees of TFGMAS wish all its members safe and happy holidays, while keeping healthy!



MEDICAL AID SCHEME



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