**Get the facts about arthritis and how to prevent or manage it**

**Johannesburg - Chances are good that either you or someone you know has arthritis. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 350 million people globally suffer from arthritis, and despite significant advancements in medicine, it remains the leading cause of disability worldwide. Although arthritis is often linked to older individuals and is more prevalent in women across all age groups, this condition can also affect children.**

**What exactly is arthritis?**

Arthritis is the inflammation of one or more joints and encompasses over 100 conditions affecting the joints, surrounding tissues, and other connective tissues. While many types of arthritis share typical symptoms such as joint pain, swelling, stiffness, and limited mobility, they can vary in causes and treatments. Osteoarthritis is the most prevalent form and is a chronic condition affecting predominantly weight-bearing joints like the knees, hips, and spine. This disease deteriorates the protective cartilage on bone ends, narrowing the joint space and potentially leading to bone overgrowth, spurs, and reduced functionality.

While it commonly occurs as people age, younger individuals may be susceptible due to injury or overuse. In South Africa, osteoarthritis presents a prevalence rate of 55.1% in urban areas and between 29.5% and 82.7% among adults over 65 in rural regions. A 2023 study by Lancet predicts nearly 1 billion people will have osteoarthritis by 2050 due to factors like ageing, population growth, and obesity.

Symptoms and signs of arthritis typically include:

* Tenderness or sensitivity around a joint.
* A feeling of warmth near joints.
* Joint pain.
* Stiffness or reduced range of motion.
* Swelling.
* Skin discolouration.

**What causes arthritis?**

The cause of arthritis varies depending on the type. For instance, osteoarthritis stems from the cumulative wear and tear on joints over time or through overuse. Autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and scleroderma occur when the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's tissues, while gout is due to joint crystal accumulation. Some forms are genetic, whereas others have unknown origins.

The cause varies according to the type you have:

* Osteoarthritis naturally occurs from joint usage over the years, wearing down cartilage.
* Gout results from excessive uric acid in the bloodstream.
* Rheumatoid arthritis and similar conditions arise when the immune system mistakenly damages joints.
* Viral infections can trigger viral arthritis.
* Some cases are idiopathic, with no identifiable cause or trigger.

**Can arthritis be cured or prevented?**

There is no cure for arthritis; however, the symptoms and progression can be managed with early diagnosis and treatment, like other chronic diseases. Treatment strategies depend on the specific type of arthritis, its severity, and the individual's general health, focusing on reducing pain and inflammation and maintaining joint function.

At Medshield, we advise consulting with a healthcare provider if you experience joint pain severe enough to disrupt daily activities or if your mobility seems impaired. Healthcare providers can help identify suitable treatments to manage symptoms. Early diagnosis and intervention can significantly impact long-term joint health. Medshield members can rest assured that arthritis treatments, including over-the-counter medications, are covered under our comprehensive and affordable benefit plans designed to meet diverse healthcare needs throughout your life journey.

Arthritis leads to joint damage characterised by pain, stiffness, and inflammation. While there are over a hundred types of arthritis, the most common are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, predominantly affecting individuals over fifty but not sparing younger people. Although arthritis can impact any joint, the hands, wrists, knees, hips, feet, ankles, shoulders, and lower back are commonly affected.

**Living with Arthritis?**

Consult a doctor if you're experiencing significant joint pain affecting daily life. Discuss your specific arthritis risks and potential warning signs with your healthcare provider. Medshield is committed to supporting your healthcare journey, offering top-notch services tailored to meet your needs at competitive rates.

Even though there is no cure for arthritis, lifestyle adjustments can alleviate symptoms and enhance the quality of life. Steps can be taken to reduce the risk or delay its onset, such as maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, optimising oral health, adopting a nutritious diet, and limiting alcohol intake. Embrace these modifications to promote joint health and well-being, ensuring an improved quality of life despite the challenges of arthritis.

**Who is at risk of developing arthritis?**

Arthritis can affect anyone, but certain risk factors include:

* Smoking and tobacco product use.
* Family history of arthritis.
* Lack of regular physical activity.
* Ageing increases the risk for types like osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.
* Gender is a risk as women are more prone to rheumatoid arthritis, whereas men are more likely to develop gout.
* Previous joint injuries, such as those from sports.
* Other health conditions including autoimmune diseases and obesity.

**Other forms or related disorders include the following:**

* Gout: Characterised by uric acid crystal accumulation in joints, such as the big toe, causing pain and inflammation.
* Lupus: A chronic autoimmune disorder leading to periods of inflammation and damage in joints, tendons, and organs.
* Scleroderma: An autoimmune disease that causes skin thickening and hardening of connective tissues throughout the body.
* Ankylosing spondylitis: Causes vertebrae to fuse, potentially leading to inflammation in other body parts, like shoulders and hips.
* Juvenile idiopathic arthritis: Targeting children, it leads to inflammation and stiffness; while it can often be outgrown, it can affect bone development.

**FIN**

(863 words)

**EDITORS NOTES**

**FURTHER MEDIA INFORMATION AND INTERVIEW REQUESTS**

* Stone issues this release on behalf of the Medshield Medical Scheme.
* For media enquiries or interview requests, please contact Willem Eksteen, CEO of Stone or a media liaison member of the Stone team at [media@stone.consulting](mailto:media@stone.consulting) / 011 447 0168
* Alternatively, contact Lilané Swanepoel at Medshield at 010 597 4982 / [lilanes@medshield.co.za](mailto:lilanes@medshield.co.za)

**MORE INFORMATION ON THE 2025 MEDSHIELD BENEFIT OPTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Benefits and Contribution amendments are subject to CMS approval.

Please refer to the 2025 Product Page on the Medshield website at [https://medshield.co.za](https://medshield.co.za/).

You can review the benefit adjustments, and value adds and download the 2025 benefit guides by visiting <https://medshield.co.za/2025-products/2025-benefit-options/> or by scanning the relevant QR code:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Benefit package and descriptor** | **QR code to view more detail** |
| **PremiumPlus** provides mature families and professionals with unlimited hospital cover in a hospital of their choice, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at 200% Medshield Private Tariff, and the freedom to manage daily healthcare expenses through a comprehensive Personal Savings Account and extended Above Threshold Cover. | A qr code with a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediBonus** provides mature families and professionals with unlimited hospital cover in a hospital of their choice, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at 200% Medshield Private Tariff, and the independence to manage daily healthcare expenses through a substantial Day-to-Day Limit. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediSaver** is perfect for independent individuals and young professionals thinking about expanding their families. MediSaver offers unlimited hospital cover in the Compact Hospital Network, with the freedom to manage daily healthcare expenses through a generous Personal Savings Account. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediPlus** provides middle to upper-income families with complete healthcare cover for major medical and daily healthcare needs. Unlimited hospital cover is provided through a choice of two hospital networks, Prime or the value-focused Compact Hospital Network. Daily healthcare expenses are covered through a generous Day-to-Day Limit. Benefits are identical in both categories, Prime and Compact, with care coordination and doctor referral mandated on MediPlus Compact. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediCore** is ideal for healthy individuals looking for comprehensive hospital cover, with daily healthcare expenses self-managed. This option offers unlimited hospital cover in the Compact Hospital Network, with In-Hospital Medical Practitioner consultations and visits paid at Medshield Private Tariff 200%. Day-to-day healthcare expenses are self-funded. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediValue** is the ideal option for growing families. It offers affordable cover for major medical and daily healthcare needs. Unlimited hospital cover is provided through a choice of two hospital networks, Prime or the value-focused Compact Hospital Network. Daily healthcare expenses are covered through a sizeable Day-to-Day Limit. Benefits are identical on both options, MediValue Prime and MediValue Compact, with care coordination and doctor referral mandated on MediValue Compact. | A qr code with a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediPhila** is ideal for families seeking first-time access to affordable private medical cover. As a MediPhila member, you have full cover for Prescribed Minimum Benefit (PMB) treatment plus R1 million per family for non-PMB In-Hospital treatment in the MediPhila Hospital Network. Coupled with this is Day-to-Day cover for your essential daily healthcare needs. | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |
| **MediCurve** If you are tech-savvy, young and healthy, then MediCurve is the ideal first-time option for you! MediCurve provides generous hospital cover in the MediCurve Hospital Network combined with unlimited virtual Family Practitioner consultations and essential optical and dental cover through network providers | A qr code on a white background  Description automatically generated |

**MORE ABOUT MEDSHIELD MEDICAL SCHEME**

* You never know when you or your family member/s may require medical care or treatment, and most importantly, whether you will have funds available to cover the costs. Medshield is a healthcare fund where all members contribute to the fund every month to cater for medical coverage should the need arise. Medshield is a healthcare fund where all members contribute towards the fund monthly to cater for medical cover should the need arise.
* Medshield has been in operation since 1968, making us one of the most experienced, knowledgeable, and reliable medical schemes in South Africa. Our extensive experience in the healthcare sector guides our understanding of our members' needs. Our excellent cover and benefits and the best quality systems and services have resulted in our exceptional size and strength.
* Each of our options offers affordably priced benefits. We continuously review and improve the range of benefits in each option to bring you what you need.
* We partner with our stakeholders to enable access to sustainable and **affordable quality healthcare** through innovative products and benefits.
* Our impeccable reputation of prompt payments to hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and other medical caregivers guarantees approval from service providers when you present your Medshield membership card.
* Our extensive partner networks place us in the perfect position to offer exceptionally competitive rates to our members.
* Medshield is well-represented throughout all nine provinces and provides seamless access to service providers in your area. Our geographical spread provides convenience if it becomes necessary for you to have a personal discussion with one of our experienced consultants. We also have a streamlined online claim submission system and immediate contact centre assistance, making it easier to manage your membership and claims from the convenience of your home or office.
* Another distinguishing factor is our extensive range of additional benefits and services. These benefits and services have been designed to give members additional support when needed, for instance, in an emergency or when suffering from a chronic or life-threatening condition.
* Compared with other medical schemes, our trustworthiness, impeccable history, and exceptional service guarantee that we come out tops!
* As the interface between the Scheme and our members, Medshield staff are the backbone of our customer service delivery. The successful delivery of service depends entirely on the calibre of our people.