**Understanding menopause and hormonal health**

**JOHANNESBURG - Menopause is a natural stage in every woman's life, yet it often feels like a mystery or taboo. As women approach their late 40s or early 50s, hormonal changes bring physical and emotional shifts that can impact daily life. Fortunately, understanding these changes and knowing where to find professional support can make a huge difference.**

**What is menopause?**

Menopause is a point in time when a woman has gone 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period. It happens on average, at age 52. It's a natural process that occurs when the ovaries stop producing reproductive hormones. When menopause happens due to surgery or medical treatment, it's called induced menopause.

**The three stages of menopause**

* **Perimenopause or "menopause transition:"** Perimenopause can begin eight to 10 years before menopause when the ovaries gradually produce less and less estrogen. It usually starts when a woman is in her 40s and can last for several months or even years. Many people begin feeling symptoms like irregular periods, hot flashes and mood swings in perimenopause.
* **Menopause:** Menopause is the point when women no longer have menstrual periods. At this stage, the ovaries don't release eggs, and the body doesn't produce much estrogen. A healthcare provider diagnoses menopause when menstrual periods have ceased for 12 consecutive months. Unlike the other stages, menopause itself is a defined moment, so you don't stay in this stage.
* **Post-menopause**: This is the time after menopause. Women stay in post-menopause for the rest of their lives. While most symptoms of menopause ease up in post-menopause, women can continue to have mild menopausal symptoms for several years in post-menopause. Women in the postmenopausal phase are at an increased risk for osteoporosis and heart disease due to low estrogen levels.

Hormonal changes due to menopause can cause uncomfortable physical and emotional symptoms. Symptoms change from person to person, but the most common symptoms include:

* **Hot flashes and night sweats:** Sudden warmth or sweating, often disrupting sleep.
* **Mood changes:** Irritability, anxiety, or depression due to hormonal fluctuations.
* **Sleep disruptions:** Difficulty falling or staying asleep.
* **Changes in libido and vaginal health**: Vaginal dryness and reduced sex drive.
* **Brain fog:** Forgetfulness or difficulty focusing.

While these symptoms vary in severity, one can often manage them through lifestyle adjustments or medical treatments. Understanding and preparing for these changes can help women navigate this life stage more effectively.

Many myths about menopause persist, often leaving women feeling isolated or misunderstood. Contrary to the belief that menopause marks the "end of youth," it is a natural transition that can empower women to focus on health and wellness, often fostering a more profound sense of self. Another misconception is that only hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can manage symptoms. In reality, many women effectively alleviate symptoms through lifestyle changes and alternative therapies. Additionally, menopause isn't limited to older women, perimenopause can begin as early as the 30s or 40s, highlighting that each woman's experience is unique.

**Options, support and guidance**

**Hormone Replacement Therapies (HRT):** HRT is a popular option for managing menopause symptoms, such as hot flashes and night sweats. Resupplying estrogenic and progesterone levels can provide significant relief. Different types of HRT, including estrogen-only and combination therapies, are available based on individual needs. Consulting a healthcare provider is essential to understand the risks and benefits. Medshield Medical Scheme supports members by covering consultations with specialists to guide this decision.

**Integrative approaches:** Many women combine traditional treatments like HRT with integrative methods. Balanced nutrition rich in calcium and vitamin D and regular exercise support bone health and boost mood. Herbal supplements, like black cohosh, may help with symptoms, but seeking medical advice before use is crucial. Mind-body practices like yoga and meditation can also reduce stress and improve well-being. Medshield's wellness programmes make it easier for members to adopt these holistic practices.

**Finding the right practitioners:** Managing menopause often requires a team of professionals. Gynaecologists address women's health, while endocrinologists provide insights into hormonal changes. Dietitians support nutrition, and mental health professionals help with emotional well-being. Accessing these experts ensures comprehensive care. Medshield members can take advantage of covered consultations, making it easier to navigate menopause confidently.

**Menopause in the workplace: building a supportive environment**

Menopause often coincides with a stage in life when women are advancing in their careers, which can create additional stress. Employers can play a role in making this transition easier by creating supportive environments that accommodate the needs of women experiencing menopause.

Simple adjustments, such as flexible working hours and access to cool, well-ventilated spaces can make a big difference. If you're feeling overwhelmed, it may help to have an open conversation with your HR department about any support they can offer. Medshield's mental wellness platform, Medshield Mind, also provides tools for managing stress, making it a valuable resource for women balancing careers and menopause.

**Embracing menopause as a new chapter**

Medshield Medical Scheme understands menopause is a unique journey, and we're here to support you at every stage. Medshield offers access to various healthcare practitioners, including gynaecologists, endocrinologists, and mental health professionals, to ensure you have the support you need.

Additionally, our [Medshield Mind](https://medshield.co.za/2025-products/2025-extra-value/) platform provides mental health resources, guided meditations, and wellness workshops to help you manage stress and navigate the emotional aspects of menopause. For women interested in holistic care, Medshield also includes wellness benefits that support a balanced lifestyle, from exercise resources to nutritional guidance.

Menopause is a natural phase, not an illness, and you can confidently embrace it with the proper support. By debunking myths, seeking professional guidance, and making health-conscious choices, you can feel empowered and supported at this stage of life. Whether you're considering HRT, exploring integrative therapies, or looking for mental wellness resources, Medshield Medical Scheme has you covered. Embrace this new chapter with the knowledge and support you deserve.

**FIN**

(964 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 / 011 447 0168
* Alternatively, contact Lilané Swanepoel at Medshield at 010 597 4982 / 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:

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| --- | --- |
| **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.