**Bone health and osteoporosis prevention**

**Johannesburg - Bones are the essential framework of the body, providing structural support, protecting vital organs, and storing vital minerals like calcium and phosphorus. Despite their crucial role, bone health often receives less attention than other aspects of well-being. Understanding that bones are composed of collagen for flexibility and minerals for strength and undergo a continual process of remodelling, regulated by osteoblasts and osteoclasts, underscores the significance of maintaining their strength. As we age, bones naturally weaken, increasing susceptibility to fractures and osteoporosis. However, sustaining strong bones and mitigating these risks is possible with the proper knowledge and proactive measures.**

In South Africa, where diverse dietary habits and lifestyle factors may impact bone health, promoting awareness and access to resources tailored to the local context becomes paramount. By prioritising proper nutrition, regular physical activity, and healthcare support, we can prevent conditions like osteoporosis and fractures, ultimately enhancing the quality of life.

**Factors contributing to bone loss and osteoporosis**

1. **Ageing:** As we age, bone density naturally declines, increasing fragility and fracture susceptibility.
2. **Hormonal changes**: Decreases in estrogen levels in women during menopause and testosterone levels in men can accelerate bone loss and increase the risk of osteoporosis.
3. **Nutritional deficiencies:** Inadequate calcium, vitamin D, and other essential nutrients necessary for bone health can compromise bone strength and increase the risk of osteoporosis.
4. **Physical inactivity:** Lack of weight-bearing exercise, such as walking, jogging, or strength training, can decrease bone density and strength.
5. **Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption:** Smoking and excessive alcohol intake can interfere with the body's ability to absorb calcium and negatively impact bone health.

**Practical tips for bone health and osteoporosis prevention**

1. Eat a **balanced diet** rich in calcium and vitamin D, which are essential for bone health. Good sources of calcium include dairy products, leafy greens, and fortified foods. One obtains vitamin D from sunlight exposure and fortified foods like fatty fish and dairy products. Consider supplementation if you cannot meet your calcium and vitamin D needs through diet alone. Consult with a healthcare provider to determine the appropriate dosage.
2. Engage in **weight-bearing exercises** such as walking, jogging, dancing, and strength training to promote bone density and strength. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week. Incorporate balance and flexibility exercises to reduce the risk of falls and fractures, particularly in older adults. Medshield may cover rehabilitation services such as physiotherapy or occupational therapy to aid in recovery and improve mobility following bone-related injuries or surgeries.
3. **Quit smoking**, as it can accelerate bone loss and increase the risk of osteoporosis. Limit alcohol consumption to moderate levels, as excessive alcohol intake can impair bone formation and increase the risk of fractures.
4. Consider **bone density testing (DEXA scan)** as your healthcare provider recommends, especially if you're at increased risk of osteoporosis due to age, hormonal changes, or other factors. Bone density testing can help assess your risk of fractures and guide preventive measures and treatment options. Medshield usually covers consultations with healthcare professionals such as orthopaedic specialists, rheumatologists, or general practitioners to diagnose and manage bone health conditions. Diagnostic tests such as X-rays, bone density scans (DEXA scans), and blood tests to assess bone health are also typically covered, depending on your chosen benefit option.
5. Discuss potential strategies for minimising bone loss with your healthcare provider if you use prescribed medications that can affect bone health, such as corticosteroids or certain anticonvulsants. Depending on the specific bone health condition, Medshield may cover various treatment options, including calcium supplements, vitamin D supplements, and prescription medications for conditions like osteoporosis. Cover for surgical procedures, such as joint replacements or fracture repairs, may also be included in the scheme's benefits.

Medshield offers various preventive care services to enhance bone health and mitigate the risk of bone-related conditions, encompassing preventive screenings, health assessments, and access to tailored wellness programmes emphasising nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle modifications. Additionally, we provide comprehensive resources and support services to enlighten members about bone health concerns, treatment alternatives, and preventive strategies, including access to educational materials, online resources, and supportive communities.

It's crucial for members to carefully review their specific plan benefits, considering potential variations in cover based on their chosen plan and any supplemental options or riders. Moreover, covering particular services or treatments may necessitate pre-authorisation or utilisation management prerequisites, underscoring the importance of consulting plan documents or contacting Medshield directly for detailed insights into cover concerning bone health issues.

Maintaining strong bones and preventing osteoporosis is a lifelong endeavour that requires proactive measures and lifestyle modifications. By prioritising nutrition, regular exercise, and healthy lifestyle habits, individuals can support bone health and reduce the risk of fractures and debilitating conditions like osteoporosis. Remember, starting to prioritise bone health is never too early or late. You can build a solid foundation for lifelong bone strength and vitality with the proper knowledge and commitment to bone-friendly behaviours.

**FIN**

(820 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 2024 MEDSHIELD BENEFIT OPTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Benefits and Contribution amendments are subject to CMS approval.

Please refer to the 2024 Product Page on the Medshield website at <https://medshield.co.za/>. You can review the benefit adjustments and value adds and download the 2024 benefit guides

* **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.
* **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.
* **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.
* **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.
* **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.
* **MediValue - Prime and Compact** - 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.
* **MediSwift** is the ideal hospital plan for active, healthy individuals. Major medical emergency and In-Hospital treatment are covered up to R1 million per family in the Compact Hospital Network, with the added benefit of day-to-day treatment for non-professional sports injuries. As a hospital plan, MediSwift offers no Day-to-Day benefits, allowing members the freedom to self-manage their daily healthcare expenses.

**Medshield Medical Scheme - Live Assured knowing you have a Partner for Life.**

**ABOUT MEDSHIELD MEDICAL SCHEME**

* 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 combined with 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.
* 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.
* Our extensive range of additional benefits and services is another distinguishing factor. Our benefits and services have been designed to give members additional support when they need it most, 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!