**Living well with autoimmune disorders**

**JOHANNESBURG - Your immune system is supposed to protect you from viruses, bacteria, and other harmful invaders. However, when you have an autoimmune disorder, your immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells in your body. It can lead to inflammation, pain, and damage to different parts of your body.**

There are many different types of autoimmune disorders. Some of the more common ones include:

* Rheumatoid arthritis, which affects the joints,
* Type 1 diabetes, which affects the pancreas,
* Lupus, which can affect many organs, including the skin and kidneys,
* Psoriasis, which affects the skin,
* Multiple sclerosis, which impacts the nervous system, and
* Hashimoto's thyroiditis which affects the thyroid gland.

Living with an autoimmune disorder can sometimes feel confusing or overwhelming, but with the proper care and support, it is possible to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

**Why autoimmune disorders happen and how to diagnose them**

It is essential to know that autoimmune diseases are not contagious. Doctors are still learning exactly why autoimmune diseases develop, but it has been confirmed that genetics play a role, which means you may be more likely to develop an autoimmune disorder if someone else in your family has one. Women are also more likely to be affected than men. Environmental factors like certain infections or exposure to chemicals could increase the risk, and stress and gut health are also believed to play a part.

The symptoms of autoimmune disorders can vary widely and sometimes feel confusing. Many people experience extreme tiredness that doesn't improve with rest. Others may feel ongoing joint or muscle pain, have skin rashes, experience digestive problems, or struggle with numbness and tingling in the hands or feet. Some people notice they have trouble concentrating, often describing it as "brain fog."

Because these symptoms can come and go and look similar to other illnesses, getting a diagnosis can sometimes take time. There is no single test to confirm an autoimmune disorder. If symptoms persist or worsen, it is crucial to speak to your doctor. Doctors usually rely on blood tests, physical examinations, imaging scans such as MRIs or X-rays, and a detailed review of your health history. Sometimes, your general practitioner might refer you to a specialist, such as a rheumatologist, who can help with diagnosis and treatment.

**Living well with an autoimmune disorder**

Unfortunately, at the current time, most autoimmune disorders cannot be cured entirely, but they can be managed successfully. Treatment usually focuses on reducing inflammation, easing symptoms, and preventing further damage to the body. Many people with autoimmune diseases live long, active lives by working closely with their healthcare teams and making minor but essential lifestyle adjustments.

Medshield's Chronic Disease Management is designed to help members with chronic conditions like autoimmune disorders. We offer support to make it easier for you to get the care and treatment you need. Living with a chronic condition means making some changes – but it doesn't mean giving up the life you love.

**Here's how you can manage better every day:**

1. **Stick to your treatment plan** – Always follow your doctor's advice even if you feel better. Skipping medication or appointments can make symptoms worse.
2. **Rest when you need to** – Fatigue is common. Don't feel guilty about taking breaks or getting extra sleep when your body needs it.
3. **Eat foods that help your body** –A healthy diet can reduce inflammation and boost energy. Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, oily fish (like salmon), and lean meats. Try to avoid too much sugar, fast food, and processed snacks.
4. **Keep moving** – Exercise can help you feel stronger and happier. Start small with activities like walking, swimming, or stretching. Listen to your body, and don't overdo it.
5. **Manage stress** – Stress can make autoimmune symptoms worse. Try activities like meditation, prayer, yoga, or spending time with loved ones. Even a few minutes a day can make a difference.
6. **Stay connected** –You are not alone. Support groups, friends, and family can help you through tough times. Talking to others who understand what you're going through can lift your spirits.

**How Medshield supports you**

An autoimmune disorder may change the way you live in some ways, but it does not have to take away your joy, your goals, or your future. You can live a whole and meaningful life with the proper care, support, and small healthy habits.

If you are a Medshield member diagnosed with a chronic condition listed under the Chronic Disease List (CDL), you can apply to register on the Chronic Medicine Management Programme. Once your registration is approved, you can access a range of benefits covering prescribed minimum benefits (PMB) treatment protocols, including approved medication, necessary blood tests, and doctor consultations. These benefits are provided according to the Scheme's rules and clinical criteria. Completing and submitting the required application forms as soon as possible is essential to ensure you receive your benefits without delays.

At Medshield, we support you every step of the way – helping you stay strong, stay well, and stay in control of your health.

**FIN**

(840 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.