**Acute vs chronic pain – understanding pain**

**Johannesburg - From the momentary sting of a paper cut to the persistent discomfort of chronic conditions, pain is a universal human experience that serves as a crucial warning signal that something is wrong with our bodies. Each individual's encounter with pain varies, manifesting at diverse thresholds. It is a natural response that can become a debilitating condition that impacts your quality of life.**

Understanding the difference between acute and chronic pain can help you understand pain management strategies that suit your health and lifestyle. To start, we need to know how our bodies interpret pain.

Nociceptors are specialised nerve receptors that interpret the sensation of pain in our bodies and send signals to our brain from our muscles, joints, skin and organs. Our fingertips, tongue and skin are full of nociceptors that communicate with our brain to manage how we respond to the feeling of pain. Nociceptors' ability to interpret pain differs from person to person, making it difficult to describe pain and is one of the reasons we experience different levels of pain as being subjective, making it difficult to diagnose.

**Pain's persistence – duration – determines if it is acute or chronic.**

* **Acute pain** is sharp and short-lived. Common examples include a fracture, burn, kidney stones, pulling a muscle or developing an infection resulting from open wounds. Acute pain can last for up to 3 months (12 weeks) and can impact your daily mobility for up to 2 months.
* **Chronic pain** persists daily for over three months. It may manifest as a persistent ache, burning, stiffness, numbness, or sharp or shooting pains. Consulting a healthcare professional for a formal diagnosis and treatment plan is essential, as chronic pain is often linked to an underlying health condition such as shingles, spinal cord injury, osteoporosis, arthritis or lower back pain, among others. Unlike acute pain, chronic pain often evolves into a distinct condition, making it challenging to treat effectively.
* **Subacute pain** is present for less than three months but more than one month. It is often associated with pain experienced during the healing process, such as scar tissue from a burn wound or physical injuries from a car accident that makes physical movement difficult. Your healthcare professional may recommend long-term therapy, like physiotherapy, to help your healing process.

As subacute and chronic pain are associated with either a healing process or an underlying health condition, they require diagnosis by a healthcare professional who will identify the cause and recommend a suitable treatment plan. Understanding your medical aid cover and the correct claims procedure is crucial to save you time and pave the way to recovery.

[Medshield Medical Scheme](https://medshield.co.za/) recommends that members consult their Family Practitioner (FP) for a physical assessment. The Family Practitioner may suggest further screening and tests, including X-rays, MRIs or pathology tests. Your FP or healthcare professional will guide you in managing your healing process, including for instance, pain and inflammation medications, physical therapy, surgery, lifestyle changes and meditation.

**Living with pain**

Pain, whether acute, subacute, or chronic, is a complex and subjective experience that demands individualised treatment. Distinguishing between these types of pain is essential for tailoring effective pain management strategies. Acute pain requires prompt action and may be resolved as the underlying issue heals. Subacute pain may linger but often subsides with proper care. Chronic pain, on the other hand, necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes medical, physical, and psychological components.

If you or someone you know is struggling with pain, it is imperative to consult a healthcare provider to develop a personalised pain management plan. The goal should always be to reduce pain and improve overall wellbeing, allowing individuals to lead a fulfilling and pain-free life.

**FIN**

(611 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!