**Preventing and managing chronic kidney disease**

**JOHANNESBURG - Your kidneys are crucial in maintaining health by filtering waste, balancing body fluids, and regulating blood pressure. However, many people don't know how vulnerable their kidneys are to disease. Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) is a long-term condition where kidney function gradually declines, potentially leading to kidney failure if left untreated. Understanding the causes, prevention strategies, and management options for CKD can help protect your kidney health.**

**Local research and causes of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)**

CKD develops when the tiny kidney filtering units, called nephrons, become damaged due to disease or lifestyle factors. This damage affects the body's ability to maintain fluid and electrolyte balance, leading to progressive kidney function loss. A study titled [The Prevalence of Chronic Kidney Disease in South Africa](https://bmcnephrol.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12882-023-03109-1) reports that in 2023, CKD affected between 6.4% and 8.7% of South Africans. Most of them are only diagnosed in the late stages of the disease. CKD progresses through five stages, from mild impairment in Stage 1 to complete kidney failure in Stage 5, which requires dialysis or a kidney transplant.

Several factors contribute to CKD. High blood pressure, or hypertension, damages kidney blood vessels reducing filtration efficiency. The close relationship between the heart and kidneys means that heart disease can accelerate kidney damage. Diabetes is another leading cause as high blood sugar levels harm kidney tissues over time. Obesity also increases the risk of diabetes and hypertension, both major contributors to CKD. Additionally, chronic use of anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen, can lead to kidney damage. Lifestyle choices, including smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, further impair kidney function and increase disease risk.

Though costly, new treatments such as [SGLT-2 inhibitors](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11146657/#:~:text=SGLT2%20inhibitors%20reduce%20the%20risk%20for%20kidney%20failure%20and%20are,that%20contribute%20to%20kidney%20health.), originally for diabetes, help slow CKD by reducing blood pressure and protecting the kidneys. Early screening is key, especially for those with diabetes or high blood pressure.

**Recognising symptoms**

CKD often progresses silently, with symptoms appearing in later stages. Fatigue and weakness are common early indicators, alongside swelling in the legs, feet, or ankles due to fluid retention. Frequent urination, especially at night, and foamy or bloody urine can signal kidney problems. High blood pressure that is difficult to control may also be a warning sign. As CKD advances, individuals may experience loss of appetite, nausea, or a metallic taste in the mouth.

**How is CKD diagnosed?**

Doctors diagnose CKD through various tests. Blood tests measure creatinine levels using the estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) to assess kidney function. Urine tests check for protein or blood, which may indicate kidney damage. Blood pressure monitoring is also crucial, as high blood pressure is a leading cause of CKD. Regular check-ups are vital for individuals with diabetes, hypertension, or a family history of kidney disease.

**Healthy lifestyle choices to ensure healthy kidneys**

Preventing CKD involves making healthy lifestyle choices that reduce strain on the kidneys:

* **Maintain healthy blood pressure and blood sugar levels**

Since hypertension and diabetes are the top causes of CKD, keeping these conditions under control is essential. This can be achieved through regular exercise (at least 150 minutes per week); a low-sodium (salt) balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; monitoring blood pressure and blood sugar levels regularly; and taking prescribed medication as directed by a doctor.

* **Eat a kidney-friendly diet**

What you eat affects your kidney health. Reduce your salt and protein intake. High sodium levels can increase blood pressure and strain the kidneys, while excess protein, particularly from red meat, can stress the kidneys. Opt for lean sources like fish, poultry, and plant-based proteins. People with CKD may need to avoid potassium (bananas, oranges, potatoes) and phosphorus (dairy, processed foods).

* **Stay hydrated**

Drinking enough water helps your kidneys function efficiently. However, excessive water intake won't "cleanse" the kidneys, and those with advanced CKD may need to limit fluids.

* **Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption**

Smoking reduces blood flow to the kidneys, worsening damage, whilst excessive alcohol use increases the risk of high blood pressure.

* **Be cautious with medications**

Overuse of anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen, can cause kidney damage. Always consult a healthcare provider before taking long-term medication.

**Managing Chronic Kidney Disease over time**

Managing CKD often requires regular medical tests, specialist visits, and long-term treatments. Medshield Medical Scheme offers chronic disease benefits that cover routine blood and urine tests, specialist consultations with nephrologists, chronic medication for hypertension and diabetes, dialysis treatment for advanced CKD, etc. Understanding your medical aid benefits can help reduce the financial burden of CKD care. If you are at risk, **ensure your plan includes comprehensive chronic disease management coverage.**

Routine check-ups and monitoring are essential for tracking CKD progression. Regular kidney function tests help doctors refine treatment plans based on the patient's condition. In advanced CKD, managing dialysis or transplantation becomes necessary. Dialysis helps remove waste and excess fluids from the blood when the kidneys fail. Kidney transplantation, where a donated kidney replaces the failing organs, is another treatment option. Early detection and proper management can delay the need for these interventions.

Your kidneys play a vital role in your well-being, and taking preventive measures can significantly reduce your risk of CKD. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or a family history of kidney disease, regular kidney screenings are essential. Protect your kidney health today for a healthier future.

**FIN**

(876 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:

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