

# Is your crazy lifestyle making you sick? - Medshield

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People are always on the go, juggling work, family, and social commitments and it is not uncommon for them to neglect their physical health. Modern lifestyle habits such as poor dietary choices, sedentary lifestyles, stress, and exposure to environmental pollutants have significantly increased chronic diseases and health issues.



## People are not eating well

South Africa faces a high burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, associated with unhealthy modern lifestyle behaviours. Furthermore, the country faces a dual burden of malnutrition, where undernutrition coexists with overweight and obesity, leading to an even higher prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases.

With the convenience of fast food and packaged meals, people are more likely to opt for processed and high-calorie foods that lack essential nutrients. The excessive consumption of sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats can lead to chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

It is essential to make healthy meal choices a priority. You can achieve this by planning meals, setting aside specific times for healthy meal preparation, and ensuring they are balanced and nutritious. You can also opt for healthy snacks such as fruits and vegetables instead of junk food. If you incorporate small changes into your daily routine, explore new healthy recipes, and intentionally purchase healthier food alternatives, you will have taken the first steps to a more nutritious diet.

## Technology might be making us lazier

Modern technology has made our lives easier, but it has also led to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle. Many people spend most of their day in front of a computer, a television or with their devices, with little to no physical activity. This lack of exercise and sitting for extended hours can lead to poor posture, weight gain, decreased muscle mass, and poor cardiovascular health.

According to a 2022 study, South Africa is among the countries with the highest obesity prevalence, with a projected increase in obesity by 47.7% in females and 23.3% in males by 2025. The WHO recommends that adults complete at least 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per week. Unfortunately, global estimates show many adults

are insufficiently active and that women are less active than men in most countries. South Africans fall within this pattern, with only 23% of adults aged 18 to 64 that meet the WHO recommendation of 150 minutes of exercise.

One of the most effective ways to prioritise your physical health is to incorporate it into your daily routine. It can include setting aside specific times for exercise, periodically standing up to stretch and walk around, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, going for a walk during lunch break, or doing a quick workout at home. In addition, people can change their work environment to promote physical health. If possible, you can invest in ergonomic chairs and desks that promote good posture and reduce the risk of back pain.

### **Stress and mental exhaustion**

A modern lifestyle also comes with its fair share of stress. People often have to juggle multiple responsibilities such as work, family, and social life, which can affect mental health. Chronic stress can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. It can also weaken the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to illness.

One of the primary reasons for neglecting physical health is the lack of time. People constantly rush from one task to another and do not have time to prioritise their physical health. When faced with choosing between going to the gym or meeting a work deadline, most people will choose the latter. Not to mention the mental exhaustion that comes with a busy lifestyle. When people are constantly under stress and pressure, they feel they need to focus all their energy and attention on their work or other responsibilities. As a result, they neglect the basics of physical health, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and exercising regularly.

It's essential to manage your stress levels by practising relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, or yoga. You can also take breaks during the day to rest and recharge. Start with small breaks and build up as needed.

### **Most are not sleeping enough**

With the increase in technology and social media, people are more connected than ever before, but this can lead to a lack of sleep as individuals spend more time on their phones and computers. Sleep deprivation can negatively impact physical health, such as decreased immunity, weight gain, and increased stress levels, raising the risk of many chronic diseases and disorders.

Try to set a regular sleep schedule and stick to it, avoid using electronic devices before bed as they can interfere with sleep patterns, and create a sleep-friendly environment that is quiet, cool, and dark.

You may have a sleep disorder if you consistently find it difficult to fall or stay asleep, feel tired, or not be well-rested during the day despite spending enough time in bed at night. Your family doctor or a sleep specialist should be able to help you, and it is essential to rule out other health or psychiatric problems that may be disturbing your sleep. Medshield Medical Scheme has benefit options that cover CPAP Apparatus for Sleep Apnoea and sleep studies for members struggling to get the rest they need.

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