



## MEDIPOS ELDERCARE

### DEMENTIA: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AND HOW TO KEEP YOUR MIND SHARP

Dementia affects around 250 000 South Africans,\* with Alzheimer's disease accounting for roughly 35 000 cases.\* With South Africa's ageing population, dementia is becoming more prevalent. While it's more common as we age, it's not a normal part of ageing and there's plenty we can do to stay mentally fit.



#### What Is Dementia?

Dementia is a general term for a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life. It's not a single disease but a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, and social abilities. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type, but there are others like vascular dementia and Lewy body dementia.



#### What Causes It?

Dementia is caused by damage to brain cells. This damage interferes with the cells' ability to communicate which affects thinking, behaviour, and feelings. Causes vary, depending on the type:

- Alzheimer's: has been linked to abnormal protein build-up in the brain.
- Vascular dementia: often follows strokes or small vessel disease.

Other types may involve genetics, lifestyle, or other medical conditions.





## Signs and Symptoms

- Slower thinking and difficulty concentrating
- Trouble with planning and decision-making
- Memory problems
- Mood changes, including depression
- Physical symptoms like weakness or difficulty walking
- Visual hallucinations (seeing things that aren't there)
- Sleep disturbances



## How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis involves a mix of:

- Medical history and physical exams
- Cognitive tests to assess memory and thinking
- Brain scans (like MRI or CT)
- Blood tests to rule out other causes rule out other causes like vitamin deficiencies or thyroid issues



## Can You Prevent It?

While there's no guaranteed way to prevent dementia, research shows that healthy lifestyle choices can reduce your risk:

- Stay active: Regular exercise boosts blood flow to the brain.
- Eat well: A balanced diet rich in fruits, veggies, and healthy fats helps brain health. Avoid processed and high-sugar foods such as white bread, cakes, biscuits, pasta's, pies, sweets, pastries and sugary drinks.
- Challenge your mind: Puzzles, reading, and learning new skills keep your brain engaged.
- Stay social: Connecting with others helps reduce isolation and stress.
- Manage your health: Control blood pressure, diabetes, and cholesterol.

Growing older doesn't have to mean losing your spark. By staying informed and proactive, you can protect your brain and enjoy a vibrant, connected life. Want to keep your mind sharp? Try learning a new language, join a walking group, take up a hobby like cooking or painting, or tackle a crossword puzzle today.





## CATARACTS AND REFRACTIVE ERRORS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

As we age, our eyes go through changes that can affect how well we see the world around us. Two of the most common vision issues for people over age 50 are *cataracts* and *refractive errors*. Let's break down what they are, how they happen, and what you can do about them.



### What Are Cataracts?

Cataracts occur when the lens of your eye becomes cloudy, making your vision blurry, dull, or foggy. It's a bit like looking through a frosted window. Cataracts develop slowly and painlessly, and they can affect one or both eyes.

Causes include:

- **Ageing** – the most common cause
- **Sun exposure** – UV rays can damage the lens
- **Smoking and alcohol use**
- **Diabetes**
- **Certain medications** like corticosteroids
- **Eye injuries or surgery**

In South Africa, cataracts are a leading cause of blindness, accounting for over **50% of blindness cases** according to the World Health Organization.





## What Are Refractive Errors?

Refractive errors happen when the shape of your eye prevents light from focusing correctly on the retina. This leads to blurry vision. The main types are:

- **Myopia (nearsightedness)** – trouble seeing far away
- **Hyperopia (farsightedness)** – trouble seeing up close
- **Astigmatism** – distorted or blurred vision at all distances
- **Presbyopia** – age-related difficulty focusing on close objects

These are all very common and affect millions of South Africans.



## How Are They Diagnosed?

Both cataracts and refractive errors are diagnosed during a **comprehensive eye exam**. This includes:

- **Visual acuity tests** (reading charts)
- **Slit-lamp examination** (to check the lens and other parts of the eye)
- **Retinal exam**
- **Refraction test** (to determine the correct prescription for glasses or contact lenses)

It's recommended that you have your eyes checked **at least once a year**, or more often if you notice changes in your vision.



## Treatment Options

### For cataracts:

- **Surgery** is the only effective treatment. It's a safe and common procedure where the cloudy lens is replaced with a clear artificial one.

### For refractive errors:

- **Eyeglasses or contact lenses** are the most common solutions.
- **Reading glasses** are often needed for presbyopia and can be purchased without a prescription.

For full details on your benefit option's optical benefits, be sure to check the [MEDiPOS Benefit Guide](#).

Vision changes are a natural part of ageing but with regular check-ups and the right treatment, cataracts and refractive errors can be managed effectively. If you haven't had an eye exam recently, now's a great time to book one. A simple check-up could be the difference between blurry days and a bright future.

\*Sources: [WHO SciELO Clicks](#)





## STAY SAFE, HEALTHY AND HAPPY: FESTIVE SEASON TRAVEL TIPS

Planning a holiday getaway this festive season? Whether you're heading to the coast, visiting family, or exploring one of South Africa's beautiful natural spaces, travel should be a joyful experience – but that means being well prepared. Here are some essential tips to help you stay healthy, secure, and financially savvy while enjoying your well-earned break.



### Health & Wellness on the Go

**01. Pack your meds first.**

Make a checklist of all your prescription medications, supplements, and medical documents. Keep them on hand (not in your suitcase) and ensure you have enough for the entire trip.

**02. Stay hydrated and eat smart.**

South Africa's summer heat can be intense. Drink plenty of water and opt for light, nutritious meals. Avoid overindulging in festive treats, especially if you have conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure.

**03. Stretch and move.**

Long car rides or flights can lead to stiffness or even blood clots. Take regular breaks to stretch your legs, walk around, and keep your circulation flowing.

**04. Know your limits.**

Don't overdo it with dozens of activities, visits and outings. Exhaustion can sneak up quickly, so build in time to rest and recharge.



### Security Tips for Peace of Mind

**01. Be discreet with valuables.**

Avoid flashing cash or expensive items. Use a money belt or cross-body bag and keep your belongings close.

**02. Secure your home before you leave.**

According to SAPS, crime tends to spike during the festive season. Lock all doors and windows, set alarms, and ask a trusted neighbour to keep an eye on things.\*

**03. Stay alert in public spaces.**

Busy airports, bus stations, and shopping centres are hotspots for petty theft. Keep your phone and wallet secure and be cautious when approached by strangers.

**04. Share your itinerary.**

Let a family member or friend know your travel plans and check in regularly.



## Money Matters

### 01. Budget wisely.

With only one salary left before the festive season, it's important to plan ahead to avoid the dreaded "Janu-worry." Set a spending limit and stick to it.

### 02. Use cards safely.

Notify your bank if you're travelling far from home. Use ATMs in secure locations and avoid withdrawing large amounts of cash.

### 03. Look for senior discounts.

Many hotels, transport services, and attractions offer reduced rates for pensioners—don't be shy to ask!

### 04. Emergency funds are a must.

Keep a small stash of cash in case of unexpected expenses.



## Keep MEDiPOS Nearby

If you are away from home and need to visit a doctor simply log into the [website](#) and search for a healthcare provider or medical facility nearest to you.

Remember to take your MEDiPOS membership card along with you but you can also access all your membership information on the website. And remember we're always a phonecall away on 0860 100 078.

The festive season is a time for celebration, connection, and adventure. With a little planning, you can enjoy every moment. Whether you're sipping rooibos by the sea or braaing with family in the bushveld, your wellbeing is the best gift of all.

**Safe travels and happy holidays from your MEDiPOS Medical Aid team!**

\*Sources: [The Citizen](#)



## DATES TO REMEMBER

It's that time of year when we communicate your 2026 benefit changes and contributions. Keep an eye out for more information and please note that the deadline for 2026 Option changes is **31st January 2026**.

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