



## Cutting medical costs

With medical scheme contributions' rising faster than salary increases, now is the time to find ways to cut back on medical expenses.

Medical scheme increases announced this month ranged from double to triple the rate of inflation. Medical inflation is much higher than our day-to-day inflation rate, which means that each year your medical costs will eat further into your budget. However, there are ways to cut your medical expenses and stretch your medical cover even further.

### Start networking

Tap into any network arrangements your medical scheme may have. Some medical schemes have network arrangements for GPs, specialists and hospitals. If you sign up for these network options, you could receive large premium discounts.

### Self-insure

You can choose a less expensive plan that carries a co-payment for certain elective procedures. This can reduce your monthly contributions but make sure that you have emergency money kept aside if you need to undergo procedures that carry a co-payment.

### Know your doctor's rates

Patients are often embarrassed to discuss money with their health care provider but when you make an appointment, ask what rates your doctor charges and whether or not you'll be liable for any co-payments. That way, you can make informed decisions about how you're spending your health care funds.

If affordability is your greatest concern, it might be better to shop around for a provider who charges at the National Health Reference Price List (NHRPL) rates but if choice is more important to you than cost and you're happy to pay more, you'll know up-front exactly how much you'll have to spend.

### Understand your medical cover

Some medical schemes like Liberty Health pay for additional medical treatments from your risk cover so that it does not eat into your savings. For example, some funds pay for preventative screening tests like cholesterol and pap smears, contraceptives and visits to the emergency ward due to trauma and MRI's from risk cover not savings.

### Pay for medicine with cash

Never pay for over-the-counter medication or vitamins from your medical aid savings. Pharmacies often offer discounts for direct payment and you don't use up medical savings you may need for other critical or expensive healthcare services such as blood tests, glasses and GP visits. Also, ask your doctor and your pharmacist for generic medicines – they can be cheaper.

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