

# Understanding digestive health and the gut microbiome, by Medshield

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**Digestive health refers to the proper functioning and balance of the digestive system. Essentially, your digestive system breaks down the food and liquid you consume into its chemical components, such as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. These nutrients are then absorbed by the body, used for energy, and to build or repair cells.**



Maintaining digestive health is the foundation of overall well-being with the gut microbiome playing a crucial role in our immune system, nutrient absorption, and mental health. The gut microbiome consists of trillions of microorganisms, including bacteria, fungi, and viruses, present in our digestive system. These microorganisms play a vital role in maintaining digestive health, as they aid in digesting certain nutrients, producing vitamins, and communicating with the immune system. However, various factors, such as poor diet, stress, and medication, can disrupt digestive health, leading to issues like bloating, indigestion, and more severe conditions.

Understanding the intricacies of a healthy digestive system and maintaining a balanced gut microbiome is essential. This article will delve into digestive health and the gut microbiome and highlight Medshield Medical Scheme's commitment to supporting members in their journey towards optimal digestive well-being.

## **The role of Medshield Medical Scheme in digestive health**

With its focus on holistic healthcare, Medshield provides support through its benefit plans for individuals seeking medical intervention, treatments, and advice related to digestive health issues. Medshield offers comprehensive coverage for consultations, diagnostic tests, and medications to address digestive health concerns based on the selected benefit option. This ensures members have access to the care required.

## **Gastroenterological services covered by Medshield Medical Scheme**

Medshield's commitment to digestive health is evident in its coverage of gastroenterological services. Gastroenterological services typically refer to medical services for diagnosing, treating, and managing disorders and diseases affecting the digestive system. It includes consultations with gastroenterologists specialising in diagnosing and treating digestive system conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), Crohn's disease, acid reflux (GERD), and other gastrointestinal disorders.

### **Accessing digestive health services with Medshield Medical Scheme, follow these steps:**

- Consultation with a healthcare provider: If you are experiencing digestive health concerns, consult one of Medshield's Designated Service Providers (DSPs), such as a general practitioner or gastroenterologist, who can assess your condition and provide appropriate guidance.
- Medshield membership: Ensure you are a Medshield Medical Scheme member and review your plan to understand the specific cover and benefits related to digestive health services.
- Requisite referrals and authorisation: Depending on the services required, some treatment procedures may necessitate referrals or pre-authorisation from a healthcare provider. Confirm the requirements with Medshield to avoid potential issues during the claims process.
- Submitting claims: After undergoing necessary consultations, tests, or procedures, submit all relevant invoices and medical records to Medshield following their claims procedure, including any supporting documents required for cover or reimbursement.

### **Promoting digestive wellness beyond medical intervention**

Your diet influences your gut bacteria. Medshield encourages its members to prioritise a balanced diet rich in fibre, whole grains, and probiotic-rich foods, which can help maintain the diversity and balance of the gut microbiome.

Limiting ultra-processed foods is also a good lifestyle choice to start adapting. Try eating foods close to their natural state to support your gut health. While almost all foods have had some sort of processing, it is recommended that you select minimally processed foods. Foods that are not ultra-processed retain their nutritional value and do not usually have added sugar, salt, unhealthy fats or additives such as emulsifiers and artificial sweeteners, all of which may impact your gut health.

Medshield also supports the importance of regular cardiovascular exercise such as walking and cycling, stress management techniques, and maintaining a healthy weight, all of which can positively impact digestive health.

Your digestive system is extensive and involves many different organs and processes. It is always working, and any issues can become apparent immediately. Gastrointestinal symptoms are common, but understanding the cause might not always be clear. By understanding the essentials of digestive health, taking proactive steps for prevention, and leveraging Medshield's cover, individuals in South Africa can nurture their gut and embrace a life of optimal well-being.

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