**Investing in health starts with preventive screenings**

*Getting regular and medically recommended screenings is one of the most important things you can do for your health and our Vitality experts agree: don’t put these off – early detection saves lives.*

“When we talk about screenings, what we’re referring to are tests that help you understand if you might have a disease or health condition,” begins Jonathan Dugas, a long-time Vitality Health consultant for Vitality USA. “This is before there are any signs or symptoms and is important because it means finding concerns early on, when they may be easier to treat or even prevent.”

Prevention as treatment is one of the core principles of the Vitality programme. Now in 40 markets around the world impacting over 30 million lives, the programme combines behavioural economics, clinical research and data analytics to encourage members to lead a healthier lifestyle. In addition to promoting smoking cessation, healthier eating and increased exercise, the programme prioritises physical and mental health checks by encouraging, and rewarding, members for doing various screenings.

“Vitality data through our global partnerships with health and life insurers and employers continues to show the benefits of routine screenings,” adds Dugas. “People who get regular health checks are better able to detect a disease or health condition early, and this helps with better long-term outcomes – easier treatment options, less severe illness and the possibility to greatly improve longevity.”

The Pap smear is a great example of this. After this screening was introduced in the 1950s, death rates linked to cervical cancer dropped by as much as 75%[[1]](#footnote-1)[1] in the USA and other developed nations. “This is a huge success story of public health that every nation now benefits from,” says Dugas. “Through tests like this we are able to understand who might be at risk of suffering from a disease later in life and open the window for prevention through better lifestyle choices – a key to Vitality’s global success.”

According to Dugas, keeping up with these checks is the best way to catch potentially devastating diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and hypertension. And the most important checks to do? “That’s like asking which child is your favourite,” says Dugas. “Depending on your family history, age and gender, there are different screenings to prioritise, but completing a Vitality Health Check each year will help you understand your risk for heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity, which account for a growing number of deaths globally each year.”

**Reduced mortality linked to higher screening**

Dr Mosima Mabunda, Head of Vitality Wellness in South Africa, notes the effectiveness of Vitality’s incentives and rewards on screening rates across members: “Our analysis shows that Vitality members have an increased propensity to do preventive screening for cancer. This inevitably leads earlier detection and lower severity cases – ultimately reducing cancer mortality rates for those members by up to five times[[2]](#footnote-2). Our job is to get as many people engaged once they join – even if that’s through other measures initially like fitness or nutrition – as the likelihood of later completing screenings increases.”

Vitality is built on a model of Shared Value[[3]](#footnote-3). This means that it operates as a virtuous cycle of benefit for everyone in the value chain. Members enjoy better health and earn regular rewards; health providers enjoy operational cost savings and more satisfied patients; insurers become stronger and more sustainable because of fewer claims and lower costs; and ultimately society gets the benefit of healthier, happier people who are more productive and less reliant on healthcare.

Linked to this theme of Shared Value, the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention suggest that every dollar spent on prevention can save up to $5.60 in health spending[[4]](#footnote-4). “It makes medical, moral and economic sense for us to promote health screenings, says Tonja Dodd, Senior Health Strategy Analyst at Vitality USA. “One of the initiatives we have to achieve this is called the Vitality Health Check (VHC)[[5]](#footnote-5) which is a simple set of essential health screenings including blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol or lipogram, and weight assessment or body mass index.”

“We also have a Vitality Age (VA) assessment which evaluates all aspects of your wellness such as healthy eating, physical activity and stress management – to focus on mental health concerns, too.”

**Making screenings relevant: age-adjusted healthcare**

Another important consideration is that Vitality members are now living longer, healthier lives. This has meant tailoring the screening approach to the specific health concerns of those in older age groups. “We’ve launched an age-based programme[[6]](#footnote-6) called Vitality 65+ in our South African market where members enjoy exclusive enhancements to the Vitality programme,” says Head of Marketing for Vitality Global, Iona Maclean. “Here, we offer age-appropriate activities and extra screening assessments for an older generation who face both elevated and unique health risks.”

As part of the Vitality 65+ VHC, adjustments have been made to the biometric ranges for blood pressure and weight to reflect the changing age-linked health risks for these members. It also includes a clinically verified screening test for falls risk – with risk of falling, and the consequences related to this, a major concern in older age groups.

From seniors to juniors, Vitality also places an emphasis on child health. “We’ve introduced a **Kids Vitality Health Check in SA too,” says Maclean, “Really with the intention to ‘normalise’ health screenings from a young age so that children see there’s nothing to fear.” This set of screening for children is more limited and usually** includes a BMI measurement, blood pressure measurement, as well as a health behaviour and developmental questionnaire. And, as with the adult screening, children are also allocated their share of Vitality points.

“We’ve made our annual VHC a family experience,” says Vitality South Africa CEO Dinesh Govender. “I have teenage daughters who join my wife and I for all our checks and we’ve started a tradition of ‘temptation bundling’ where we go to the movies afterwards. This is a behavioural economics[[7]](#footnote-7) tool where you combine an activity that gives you instant gratification (the movies) with one that is beneficial but has a delayed reward (the health check). I encourage parents to try this. It really works, just as much for me as my kids”.

**The consequences of COVID-19 on health checks**

According to Dr Mosima Mabunda, Head of Wellness for Vitality South Africa, we are starting to see the devasting effects of delayed screenings due to COVID-19, globally. “During the height of the pandemic, screenings became less accessible and less of a priority for people. Unfortunately, we’re now starting to see the consequences of this: having not picked up health risks early enough on.”

Discovery Health – Vitality’s South African health insurance partner – reported a decline in mammograms by 15% and pap smears by 12% over this time. It also showed that general health checks were down 50% at the peak of the pandemic compared to pre-COVID-19 levels. Here, Dr Mabunda’s message is simple: “It’s time to step back and look at our overall health again and get back to our preventive checks. Don’t put off your health screening – early detection can save your life.”

**The future of health screenings**

With technological developments in the wearables space, we’re starting to see exciting opportunities to re-frame health screenings from once-off annual events to being part of day-to-day life. “Through our global partnerships with brands like Apple and Samsung, we’ve been able to encourage the use of fitness devices which don’t just track physical activity, but are also moving into the medical arena,” says Lee Corrigan, Senior Vice President of Product Development for Vitality Global. “This is shaping a new era of wearable health where devices will play a role in healthcare delivery, diagnostics, and even therapeutics. Soon we’ll see wearable tech as a 24/7 health screening on our wrists – as a way to monitor, diagnose, and treat various health problems”.

Corrigan adds that by integrating personalised health experiences into health interventions, Vitality hopes to drive more engagement with members. “This introduces the important move to consumer-led healthcare. You are collecting your own – very valuable – health data over long periods of time that will undoubtedly help your healthcare providers in times of need. The patient becomes the point of care.”

The Vitality experts agree on the high ”ROI” of health screenings for all stakeholders – from individuals to insurers – enjoying the benefits. Vitality is committed to providing easy, affordable access to these life-saving screenings, where the early diagnosis and treatment of diseases is key.

1. # [1] Cervical Cancer Prevention. 2009. [Link](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov%2Fpmc%2Farticles%2FPMC2762353%2F&data=05%7C01%7CLindsay.Hartmann%40vitalityglobal.com%7C0499b728333d4745fe8408db10190d57%7C710b1675b8704652b453d417a82a0b6f%7C0%7C0%7C638121472001518630%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=zNftqesjuIJ3zrzD9SqNxRRTkbv%2FTIPqcdIYNVNnq9U%3D&reserved=0).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Internal data from Discovery Life and Discovery Vitality [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Vitality Global. Shared Value. [Link](https://vitality.international/about-vitality/shared-value-insurance.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention. 2009. The power of prevention chronic disease. [Link](https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/5509). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Discovery Vitality. 2021. The Science of Vitality. [Link.](https://www.discovery.co.za/site/binaries/content/documents/managedcontent/discoverycoza/assets/vitality/science-of-vitality/the-science-of-vitality-journal.pdf/the-science-of-vitality-journal.pdf/contentdelivery%3Abinary) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Discovery Vitality. Vitality 65+. [Link.](https://www.discovery.co.za/vitality/dont-just-live-live-it-up-with-vitality-65-plus) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Forbes. 2019. The science of winning the battle for self-control. [Link](https://www.forbes.com/sites/carleysime/2019/02/21/the-science-of-winning-the-battle-for-self-control/?sh=5c99b3bf4229). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)