Laughter – the wonder medicine

Laughter is a very powerful tool against disease. It lowers blood pressure and stress, increases oxygen use and muscle flexion, makes positive changes in hormones and even activates the immune system.

Humor has a positive impact on pain, too. As early as the thirteenth century, surgeons used humor to distract patients from the pain of surgery. One recent study found the use of humor led to an increase in pain tolerance, and another found that stress-related hormones decreased during episodes of laughter.

Deb Stankiewicz, Advocate parish nurse at The First Congregational Church of Western Springs, has taught many workshops on laughter and wellness. She keeps humor alive in her life because she knows it's healthy:

*My number one wholistic health strategy is to try to "see funny" in every day and in every way. I have become expert at doing so – by practicing daily! One must be willing and intentional about honing a quick wit that provides the brain with a continuous bath of the stuff that pushes the release of those feel-good neurotransmitters. I even have a free humor app on my phone that I use every day to get a few laughs myself and to pass a few giggles along to people around me.*

Laughter is infectious and healthy for you. It feels good, costs nothing and has no side effects. Why not exercise your sense of humor today and every day!

Prayer: Creator God, help me remember to practice finding the joy in each day. Let laughter fill my home. Show me how to make others smile. Lighten my heart. Amen.


Practical Guide to the Affordable Care Act

Top things for healthy individuals to know

1. An insurance company can no longer drop you when you get sick just because you made a mistake on your coverage application. However, it can still rescind coverage if you intentionally put false or incomplete information on your application or if you fail to pay your premiums on time. Your insurance company must give you at least 30 days’ notice before it can rescind your coverage, giving you time to appeal the decision or find new coverage.

2. Parents have new options to cover their children. If you have children under age 26, you can insure them if your policy allows for dependent coverage. The only exception is if you have an existing job-based plan and your children can get their own job-based coverage.

3. Job-based health plans and new individual plans are no longer allowed to deny or exclude coverage to any child under age 19 based on health conditions. This includes babies born with health problems.

4. Starting in 2014, if your income is less than the equivalent of about $88,000 for a family of four today and your job doesn’t offer affordable coverage, you may get tax credits to help pay for insurance.

5. Starting in 2014, if your employer doesn’t offer insurance, you will be able to buy insurance directly in the Health Insurance Marketplace that gives you power similar to what large businesses and members of Congress have to get better choices and lower prices.

The Illinois Consumer Assistance Program helps with problems and questions about health coverage. Its walk-in location is 100 Randolph St, 9th Floor, Chicago, IL 60601. Call 877.527.943, or visit insurance.illinois.gov to learn more.

Kaiser Family Foundation (kff.org) and Healthcare.gov are the sources for the above information. Please refer to those sites for further explanation and clarification.

May focus: Individuals with health concerns