Research suggests laughter is good for the heart. Not just because laughing shows you are happy, but because it can improve blood flow, reduce artery inflammation and increase HDL, the “good” cholesterol. These results of laughing actually reduce stress, and when combined with these other results help protect you against heart attack and cardiovascular disease.

According to Suzanne Steinbaum, a cardiologist and spokeswoman for the American Heart Association, “Once you start laughing, it forces you to feel better.”

“A bonus with laughter is that its effects have been found to last 24 hours,” she said. That’s a good reason to laugh every day. Often, laughter and joy are things we stumble across. Try being intentional about finding joy to help improve your well-being. What fills you up? If you love the outdoors, schedule time for walks and exploration. Do you know your love language (see sidebar)? If acts of service fill your heart, give, and as the saying goes “you shall receive.”

The things that bring you joy have direct correlation to your level of stress and therefore, heart health.
FORGIVENESS IS GOOD FOR HEALTH

As Christians we understand that we are called to forgive when we recite the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We should also forgive because it is a means to increased emotional well-being.

Forgiveness Is a Process
If you have been hurt by someone, these five dynamics can assist you as you move forward to forgive.

1. Feel the feelings. Identify what is a trigger for you. Feelings of anger, hurt or sadness? What meaning do they have for you?
2. Forgiveness of self. Most of us will review what happened over and over in our minds. We wonder if we caused the problem and how it could have been avoided. What did we learn? Facing our own limitations and the need of grace leads us to have more compassion for others.
3. Set boundaries. This means finding ways to make sure the experience doesn’t happen again. It might be using the legal system, setting limitations to a relationship, or working on one’s own ability to not take personally what a difficult person says or does.
4. Forgive so you feel better. Forgive whether or not you feel it is right. If you don’t, you can become bitter, angry and hard to be around. Carrying anger and hurt can have negative effects on your body and mind. When we let go and forgive another person we feel better.
5. Rebuild trust. If it is safe to continue a relationship with an offending person, trust must be rebuilt. Identifying what is needed can be hard work. Doing what is needed can be even harder. However, it is a means that can lead to reconciliation.

PERSONAL SUCCESS STORY

Family Fitness Challenge

My sister challenged our whole family to wear pedometers for one month—to see how many steps we could collectively take. It was our version of a family fitness challenge. For those of us who sit behind a desk, it gave extra incentive to get up and move.

Thirteen of us took up the challenge and logged our daily steps. Let’s just say we have a competitive family—we logged 3,476,952 steps in 27 days! That’s an average of 9,905 steps a day among the 13 of us. My brother—who is very competitive—was the winner with 439,065 steps, an average of 16,262 per day. We wondered if he did anything else besides walk that month. My husband Jeff was second, I was third and my grown son Louis was fifth. Jeff, Lou and I logged 1,032,366 steps among us, for an average of 12,475 steps a day each—not too bad!

My son has been my inspiration. He was a picky eater growing up and more sedentary than active. He is now moving and on his feet all the time, and has made a decision to eat healthy and try new foods. In the last year he lost over 20 pounds, is more confident and said he feels much better now that he eats healthier.

Whatever you enjoy that keeps you active, get out there and just do it. The rewards are plentiful!
ASK A NURSE
Jo Sanders, BSN, RN
Faith Community Nurse—Illinois Great Rivers Conference member

Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

Assess the things you are grateful for in your life. Then, give thanks. One of the most effective ways to improve your overall health and well-being is by practicing an “attitude of gratitude.”

Studies show that being grateful and expressing gratitude can reduce blood pressure, improve sleep, help you feel more optimistic and energetic and even improve relationships. For those dealing with a chronic illness, practicing gratitude exercises has been shown to improve the quality of life.

When life is challenging, it can be difficult to feel grateful, but remembering to do so can help us cope. Practice these gratitude exercises every day:

• **Count your blessings.** Write down at least three things for which you are grateful.
• **Express gratitude** to at least one person in your life. Visit, call or write a letter of thanks.
• **Practice acts of kindness** to others without expecting anything in return.

The more you practice, the more you will find that an “attitude of gratitude” becomes life-altering—another thing for which you will be grateful.

Rejoice always. Pray continually.
Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Easy Healthy Recipe

Beets are named for a valuable compound they contain—**betaine**—shown to improve vascular risk factors, protect internal organs and ward off chronic diseases.

Try this delicious way to add beets to homemade hummus, and/or use beet chips in place of your favorite chips for dipping.

**Beet Cranberry Hummus**

**INGREDIENTS**
- 10 oz. (approximately 2) roasted beets
- ¼ cup whole berry cranberry sauce
- 1 can garbanzo beans, mostly drained
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 green onions (optional)

**DIRECTIONS**
Combine all ingredients in processor or blender. Puree until smooth. Serve with vegetables, crackers or pita.

WELL-BEING TIPS FOR LEADERS

Nurture a Culture of Health

The phrase “Culture of Health” has gained prominence over the past few years—with good reason. A recent study by the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) found that organizations that value the well-being of their employees have better business outcomes. The research showed stock values in publicly held organizations that scored high on the HERO scorecard appreciated 235%, while those without well-being programs had an appreciation of 159% over a six-year period. Think of how this can translate in your church or organization.

How do you nurture a Culture of Health? One place to start is with leadership.

• Leaders who model well-being set the stage for embedding it into company culture.
• Managers engaged in well-being activities found that direct reports were 15% more likely to thrive in their well-being six months later.
• Align well-being initiatives with your company’s policies, structure and incentives.

The Center for Health provides many tools—like our new **Prediabetes and Smoking Cessation** toolkits—to support well-being efforts and nurture a Culture of Health.
WELL-BEING ARTICLE

Safety in the Home: A Family Affair

Safety in the home is an important aspect of a healthy family. It’s a best practice especially if you have children or elderly people in your home, and even important for pets.

Promote home safety with the following strategies:

- Install smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors throughout your home, at least one on every level and outside bedrooms. Check them monthly to be sure they are working.
- Develop a fire escape plan and practice it so you’ll be prepared if an emergency does occur.
- Create a checklist that can be performed by anybody in the home. Refer to it on a regular basis to make sure all safety considerations are kept up to date. Examples of checklist items:
  1. Fresh batteries in smoke and CO detectors
  2. Fire extinguisher(s) in proper working condition
  3. Flashlights and battery-powered lighting ready to use during a power outage. Never use candles.
- Carpet your stairs where possible to reduce slipping. Be sure the carpet is firmly tacked down at the edges.
- Attach cords for window blinds and drapes to floor mounts that hold them taut, or wrap these cords around wall brackets to keep them out of reach. Use safety stop devices on the cords.
- Test the stability of large pieces of furniture, such as floor lamps, bookshelves and television stands.
- Remove dangerous items from your home or put them out of the reach of people or animals they can harm.
- Blow out all candles when you leave the room or go to bed.

Adapted from: healthychildren.org; safetied.org; nfpa.org; homesafetysmartcheck.com

Print and Share Bulletins

See this issue’s bulletins for great resources to share with your congregations. Print and stuff in weekly worship booklets or other church newsletters, use as a small group handout or forward to church groups you think could benefit from the topic. We support you in your effort to create a more vital church.

**BULLETIN #1:** Go Red for Women

**BULLETIN #2:** Healthy Happy Families

Resources

The Center for Health offers a host of resources at wespath.org/center-for-health/.

- CFH articles related to each of the five dimensions of well-being
- Congregational resources—including UMC Health Ministry Network
- Financial well-being—Wespath selection of articles about retirement, financial planning, family events and other topics
- Newsletters and Bulletins found at wespath.org/CFH/newsletter
- Healthy You...Healthy UMC brochure
- Healthy Families webinar series, August 2, 2016 – February 7, 2017

External Resources

- American Heart Association
- National Institute for Mental Health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Healthy Living resources

Let Us Know

If you have questions or comments, please contact us anytime at: wellnesssteam@wespath.org

The journey to well-being lasts a lifetime. Sometimes the path is smooth and other times, there are bumps in the road and work to be done to restore balance. With patience, persistence and support from the Center for Health—you can do it!

Disclaimer

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