



Wellness@WIC



Spring ❖ 2015

Gelotology: the science of laughter! by Niani Dunner, State WIC Office

According to the National Wellness Institute, emotional wellbeing involves:

- being aware of your feelings, and the feelings of others
- maintaining relationships, based on mutual commitment, trust and respect
- learning to express feelings freely, and managing them effectively
- the ability to cope with stress, and experience relaxation
- working to be positive and enthusiastic about yourself, and life in general.

The thing is, it can be hard to stay on the sunny side of life, especially if you're faced with constant stressors, such as balancing work and family life, or personal health issues. Sometimes to practice emotional wellness we just need a good laugh. Just ask a specialist in *gelotology*.

From the Greek term *gelos* (to laugh), *gelotology* is the science of laughter, and its benefits to our social, mental, and physical well-being. Benefits of laughter are similar to health

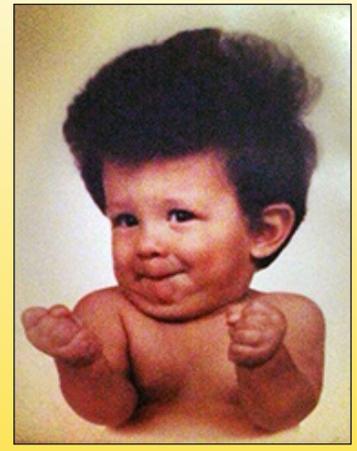
benefits of aerobic exercise, both psychological and physiological. Laughing out loud exercises and relaxes muscles, increases circulation and respiration, and burns calories.

According to one study, laughing aloud (either real or fake) 20 times, is the **cardiovascular equivalent** to a 3-minute workout on a rowing machine!

Laughter improves immune system defenses, mental functioning and memory, and releases endorphins. The psychological benefits of humor include reduced anxiety, tension, stress, depression and loneliness. It improves self-esteem, restores hope and energy. Don't believe me? Findings are published in *The International Journal of Humor Research*.

Laughter begins as an uncontrollable reflex beginning at four months of age. Soon babies may giggle up to 400 times a day! Why? Humor is believed to be an adaptive coping strategy—possibly to combat

stress, increase social cohesion and support. It eases tension and brings people together, often by poking fun at common dilemmas. And it's contagious!



AkwardFamilyPhotos.com

Here at the State WIC office, we've started a **Laugh Board** (similar to the Brag Board). Staff were asked to write down funny movies, books, websites, quotes, jokes, pictures—whatever they turn to for a good laugh—and share it with the rest of us. [Click here](#) to see what's been added so far. Will your agency catch the laughing bug?

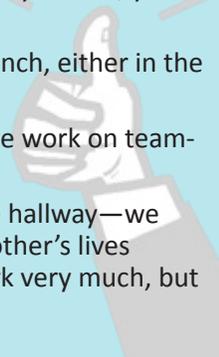
KUDOS KORNER

by Laura Spaulding, Deschutes County



Deschutes WIC puts high value on celebrating one another and having fun at work. This keeps morale up, stress down (a little!), gives us ways to connect and have periodic events to look forward to. Here are a few of the things we do:

- Celebrate birthdays! Every New Years' we fill out questionnaires listing our favorite foods, flowers, and random "get to know you" questions ("Favorite Movie Ever?"). We draw names, and your selection becomes your Secret Birthday Person! On their birthday you decorate their desk, give them little gifts (\$15 max), and a birthday card that everyone signs. Each month we have a Birthday Potluck, where we reveal the Secret Birthday Person, and read the questionnaire aloud to the group. If it's your birthday month, you don't have to bring food for the potluck.
- We hold potlucks, celebrations, and staff get together for lunch, either in the building or go out.
- We have an annual retreat (away from the facility) where we work on team-building, etc. We potluck breakfast and lunch at these too.
- We talk! We keep in touch at meetings, over lunches, in the hallway—we know what's going on with one another and support each other's lives outside of work. We may not see each other outside of work very much, but each of us can find a listening ear and a caring heart here!!





May is National Mental Health Awareness Month

- **Common myths and facts about mental illness.** “It is impossible to prevent mental illnesses.” “Kids don’t get mental illness.” Are these myths or facts? Learn about common misconceptions, by [clicking here](#).
- **Fight Stigma!** Social stigma still surrounds mental illness. Many well-known people have personal experience with stigma related to mental illness. [Click here](#) to read their quotes.

JUST BREATHE

A Four-step guide to breathing, self-care and mindfulness.

Just Breathe

Research shows that **R**stopping and taking a few deep breaths (with a slightly longer out-breath) is a trustworthy way of calming our stress arousal system. When people become surprised or upset, they hold their breath, which tells the brain that something is wrong. The brain responds by releasing stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline, which activate fight, flight or freeze reactions. When you slow down and belly breathe, the brain receives the message that you are now safe, and it stops making stress chemicals, and produces “feel good” chemicals, like serotonin and endorphins. These activate the thinking brain and the body’s repair systems. You can once again think clearly, stay calm and behave professionally.

Be Here and Now

By breathing, and relaxing the body and the mind, we can enter into the present moment and exist therein, instead of dwelling on the past, or planning for the future. Simply being in the present moment turns out to be an important means of self-awareness and self-regulation.

Closing your eyes and tuning into your breathing (or other senses) helps you do this.

Let Go

Much of our stress is caused by unnecessary worry, overthinking and anxiety. Getting upset about a situation that we cannot change is often unhelpful and unnecessary. Letting go can be a liberating.



How might you try using this when stuck in traffic? How about with your WIC participants?

Begin Again

Mindfulness is about trying again (and again) to be here now, enter the present moment clearly, and let go of what’s unnecessary, so we can stay calm and carry on. Assuming a gentle attitude towards ourselves is the best place to begin, if we want that calming demeanor to radiate outward towards others around us.

Adapted from Robin Rose and Pathways Research & Training Center.

Pay Attention to Your Mental Health



Did you know? Mental and physical health are connected. Taking care of your mental health can help you feel better physically, and taking care of your body is important for your mental health.



Each year, **1 in 5** women in the United States has a mental illness ranging from mild to serious.¹

Almost **twice** as many women as men have ever been diagnosed with **anxiety**.²

Tips

Take care of yourself!

- ✓ Fight stress by taking time to do something you enjoy like dancing or reading
- ✓ Reach out to friends and family for help when you need it
- ✓ Call 1-800-662-4357 for confidential treatment referral and information on mental health and substance abuse



Schedule your well-woman visit

A well-woman visit is a time to see your health care provider to:

- ▶ Discuss family history, family planning, and personal habits, such as alcohol and tobacco use
- ▶ Schedule necessary tests, such as screenings for depression, alcohol and tobacco use, and more
- ▶ Discuss whether you should consider medication, therapy, or other treatments for mental health and substance use disorders
- ▶ Set health goals, such as being active and maintaining a healthy weight
- ▶ Learn more about National Women’s Health Week at womenshealth.gov/nwhw.

