

### **Laughter** *Brings a Smile* by Peggy Swarbrick

Laughter and smiling are good for wellness. I have been thinking about laughter and smiling a lot lately. I have been trying to smile more in the past few years, and even more this year, laughing at funny things people send or tell me. This has been so helpful during this challenging time.

I recall two things about my mother—she laughed often and smiled a lot. Even when we were facing hard times and challenges, my mom always found a way to lighten the moment and ease intense tensions. She loved posing for the camera and I now cherish these photos. She even managed to smile and break the tension when she was experiencing some very difficult situations dealing with me, especially when I was not well. I was stunned how she could just laugh and smile through those times. Since then, I have come to understand how important smiling and laughing are for wellness—mine and others.

For years, I had a very hard time smiling and laughing when I was not feeling well. I struggled to smile and laugh and started to hate both for a while. I am so glad I can now smile and enjoy laughter.



A good hearty laugh can go a long way. Laughter boosts the immune system, decreases stress hormones, increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies. This can help resistance to illness, which we now know is so important right now. I remember first reading about this in a book by Norman Cousins (see page 2), but today there is much more science showing us how laughter can impact physical and emotional well-being.

Even a quick smile offers a mood boost and helps our bodies release chemicals that offer health and wellness benefits.

Laughter helps us to relax, minimizes fear, diffuses conflict, lowers stress, and serves to strengthen relationships. *What makes you laugh?*

Make time for fun activities:

- ☺ Watch a funny movie, TV show, or video on YouTube.
- ☺ Read a funny book or play or listen to a comedy podcast.
- ☺ Seek out funny people who make you smile.
- ☺ Share a good joke or funny story.
- ☺ Play with a pet.
- ☺ Do something silly!

"I love people who make me laugh. I honestly think it's the thing I like most, to laugh. It cures a multitude of ills. It's probably the most important thing in a person."

*Audrey Hepburn*

## Norman Cousins

The successful writer and Editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, Norman Cousins, developed a serious and debilitating connective tissue disease when he was in his 50s. With the support of his doctor, he followed a program of laughter that, he believed, led to his recovery. Prescribing himself Marx Brothers movies and episodes of *Candid Camera*, as well as plenty of humorous reading, he began to improve. He wrote about his experience for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and went on to write a book, *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*.

Cousins lived to be 75, devoting much of the remainder of his life to the idea that laughter, hope, and positive emotions have a profound effect on our physical health. He was recruited by UCLA, where he and his colleagues founded a research center called the [Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology](#), a relatively new field dedicated to investigating the influence of attitudes and mood on the body.

Many people with long-standing and serious illnesses have been inspired by the work and life of Norman Cousins. He did not believe that every medical condition could be cured by a change in attitude, but he did believe that it's better to live with a positive attitude than otherwise, regardless of disease or disability.

In another book, *Head First: Biology of Hope*, Cousins wrote a response to some of his critics, who accused him of encouraging false hopes. He noted that false hope is surely better than false despair, emphasizing that, since we can't predict the future for certain, it's best to maintain a positive point of view. He said, "I don't know enough to say that hope can't be real. I'm not sure anyone knows enough to deny that hope is real."

## World Smile Day

In 1963, Harvey Ball, a commercial artist from Worcester, Massachusetts created the now-familiar smiley face. Because he was concerned this image would become too commercial, he wanted to set aside one day each year to smiles and kind acts around the world. Now, the first Friday in October is World Smile Day®.



Flex your smile muscles with these challenges:

- **Post-It™ Note:** Gather 10 colorful sticky notes and write down things that make you smile. Post where you'll see every morning.
- **Smile Collage:** Create a photo collage to post on social media—your best smile, smiling with friends, and whatever makes you smile.
- **Waiting:** When you are waiting in traffic or at the grocery store, smile! See who smiles back.
- **Types:** How many types of smiles can you identify? Take pictures of your different smiles and those of friends, colleagues, and family members.

### References and Resources

- Illustrations are from pixabay.com and <https://inspirationalfamousquotes.blogspot.com/>
- On laughter, see <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine.htm>
- The website for the Cousins Center is <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/cousins/history>
- For more on World Smile Day: <https://www.worldsmileday.com/>
- The smiley face is Henry Ball's original, from <https://www.discovercentralma.org/sp/the-harvey-ball-2020/>
- See <https://www.niedenthalemotionslab.com/social-functions> for recent research on three types of smiles

## Creating Space for Reflection

### The New Take Charge! Workbook

by Crystal L. Brandow

Policy Research Associates, Inc

When we think about the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, it can be difficult to determine which dimensions we can most benefit from improving at any given time. It may be unclear across the dimensions where in particular we may be thriving, in need of some support, or experiencing real challenges.

Creating the space for reflection on the Eight Dimensions of Wellness and taking an inventory of what is working in that dimension, and what's not, can help us create action plans for improving overall wellness and well-being.

To help support reflection and the development of well-being and recovery action plans around the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, PRA Well-Being – along with CSPNJ's Dr. Peggy Swarbrick and other contributors – developed [Take Charge! A Workbook to Enhance Well-Being with the Eight Dimensions of Wellness.](#)

A self-guided, self-driven workbook, this product includes an interactive chapter focused on each dimension of wellness. Whether being prompted to reflect on the quality of your health care as part of your physical wellness, or presented the opportunity to create a schedule for focusing on brain games and building skills to support intellectual wellness, *Take Charge!* creates an opportunity for users to get curious about their own wellness strengths and barriers, and create action plans for improving personal well-being.

This new workbook, released in August 2020, is designed to create a sense of empowerment around our day-to-day wellness choices and our overall well-being.



To learn more about this new workbook, or to order your copy, visit the Policy Research Associates, Inc. product page at

<https://www.prainc.com/resources/products/>

No profit is generated through the sale of this workbook, which is available for sale to both individuals and organizations.

If you have any questions about *Take Charge!*, you can contact PRA Well-Being at [wellbeing@prainc.com](mailto:wellbeing@prainc.com).

### More tools for reflection

If you would like some mindfulness tools to support your overall wellness, [download this infographic](#) from PRA Well-Being. This new product features breathing activities, tips for tuning in, and other strategies for incorporating mindfulness in our everyday lives.



## Bite-Size Wellness Advice

One of our favorite wellness resources is the collection of whiteboard videos by Dr. Mike Evans. We first came across his video on exercise, *23 and 1/2 hours*, that clearly and concisely makes the case for daily exercise. Recently, we watched [\*What can you do to get through a crap week?\*](#) It's work bookmarking for when you need it!

You can find his video collection on YouTube by searching for DocMikeEvans or by going to his website: <http://www.reframehealthlab.com/>

## Mindfulness

If you are a regular WoW reader, you know we often suggest mindfulness practice as a path to wellness. Sometimes we hear people say, "I've tried mindfulness and I'm no good at it," meaning they find it impossible to clear the mind and be fully in the present moment. That's expected—of course your mind will wander; it's what minds do! The point is not to eliminate your thoughts, but to become aware of them in a neutral and non-judgmental way. Rather than scolding yourself for thinking about your to do list or rehashing a past argument, just notice your thought and shift your attention to your body and your breathing.

Like many health habits and routines, the key to developing a mindfulness practice and eventually a mindful lifestyle, is to start small. Using a guided meditation can be very helpful for a short practice, such as taking one minute from the day. Many resources and apps are available, including mini-meditations that focus specifically on the busy mind. For example, check out <https://www.mindful.org/focus-attention/>

Try integrating mindful moments into your day. Remember the Zen proverb, "Before enlightenment, carry water and chop wood. After enlightenment, carry water and chop wood." Your life goes on, with or without mindfulness.

However, with a mindful attitude and focus, daily activities, like typing, washing dishes, opening the car door, can be done with deep attention. Be aware, amazed, and grateful about the way your hands move on the keyboard. Experience the sound and feel of running water and be grateful you have dishes to wash and food to eat.

The [UCLA Mindfulness Research Center](#) offers information and guidance, including free short meditations that you can play online or download, as well as videos, and podcasts. They now offer a free app, too.

Mindful self-care is an intentional approach to checking in with yourself routinely and building activities to recharge you and build resilience. If you want to enhance your own self-care, you may be interested in the free assessment that produces recommendations based on what you are doing now, at <http://ed.buffalo.edu/mindful-assessment/scale/assessment.html>

## Self-Management Referral Algorithm

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends that primary care providers refer all patients with behavioral health needs to recovery-oriented mental illness self-management education and support. To help providers follow these guidelines in the era of COVID-19, UIC and its partners created an algorithm for choosing self-management programs that are now available virtually. Based on phases of emotional distress, the algorithm shows what kinds of knowledge patients need, programs that provide it, and how to locate these programs online. Visit the Center's web site to learn more and to start referring people to self-management support today!

<https://www.center4healthandsdc.org/peer-led-mental-health-self-management-algorithm-of-care.html>

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