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## **Laughter is the best medicine, says Holy Redeemer geriatrician**

**(MEADOWBROOK, PA)** – A man walks into a psychiatrist’s office and screams: “I’m a wigwam, I’m a teepee! I’m a wigwam, I’m a teepee!” And the psychiatrist says: “Sit down, you’re two tents.”

Dr. Fabius is medical director of geriatrics at Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center and says that laughter and humor play an important role in people’s lives.

“A lot has been written about the health benefits of humor and laughter,” says Dr. Fabius. “Some evidence suggests that it can lower blood pressure, boost the immune system, reduce stress, improve brain function and protect the heart. While these benefits may never be completely proven, I do know that humor and laughter bring joy into our lives and that is a good thing.”

According to Dr. Fabius, maintaining a sense of joy and a love of life is especially important for older adults because the risk of isolation and depression rise as we age.

“Many times I’ll see patients who develop a physical limitation, such as a limp,” he says. “They become reluctant to be outside the home because of that limitation. That in turn leads to a life that is increasingly isolated, which can then lead to depression. It’s a downward spiral that is all too common.”

To combat that downward spiral, Dr. Fabius encourages his patients not to give in to their impairments and resolve to continue “having fun.” The goal, he says, is to incorporate humor and laughter into the fabric of our lives, finding it naturally in everything we do. To up the laughter quota, Dr. Fabius recommends the following strategies:

- Smile more. Smiling is the beginning of laughter and, like laughter, it’s contagious. When you look at someone or see something even mildly pleasing, practice smiling.
- Count your blessings. The simple act of considering the good things in your life will distance you from negative thoughts that are a barrier to humor and laughter.

- Spend time with people who have successfully incorporated humor into their lives. These are people who naturally take life lightly. Their points of view and their laughter are contagious.
- Deal with your stress. Stress is a major impediment to humor and laughter.
- Laugh at yourself. Share your embarrassing moments. The best way to take ourselves less seriously is talk about times when we took ourselves too seriously.
- Pay attention to children and emulate them. They are the experts on playing, taking life lightly and laughing.
- Attempt to laugh at situations rather than bemoan them. This helps improve our disposition and the disposition of those around us.
- Use cathartic laughter to release pent-up feelings of anger and frustration in socially acceptable ways.
- Lower anxiety by visualizing a humorous situation to replace the view of an anxiety-producing situation.
- Watch funny movies or television shows and read comic authors.
- Spend less time with overly serious people.

“Remember that even in the most difficult of times, a laugh, or even a smile, can go a long way toward helping us feel better,” says Dr. Fabius. “The good feeling that we get when we laugh can remain with us as an internal experience even after the laughter subsides.”

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