

together

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Laughter: Opens the Soul, Frees the Spirit, Connects Us All

By Edward T. Creagan, M.D.

Bill Cosby, the great comedian, hit the nail right on the head when he said, "Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it." Laughter opens the soul; laughter frees the spirit and makes us realize that despite our sufferings, we are not alone.

As a board-certified medical oncologist and as a board-certified expert in hospice medicine, I see patients and families at their darkest hour. Illness is a great leveler of one's social status. The credentials on the wall, the make of car in the garage, the boats, and the checkbooks really don't matter when life has been reduced to its bare essence. Despite the charged environment of the bedside in this setting, without doubt, some of the funniest people I have ever met are those with advanced cancer.

I've often wondered why this is. It then occurred to me that throughout history, every great comedian has come from a part of society that has suffered. I know of no truly funny comedian who grew up with privilege and prominence. I believe that those who have suffered see the absurdity of life and recognize that yes, life is funny, and silly things do happen. Let me share with you the following story.



Benefits of Laughter

- Gives us power
- Helps us cope
- Provides perspective
- Keeps us balanced
- Releases stress and tension
- Increases circulation
- Increases oxygen to muscles
- Massages our inner organs
- Decreases muscle tension
- Decreases blood pressure
- Releases the body's natural pain killers
- Boosts immune system

Several months ago, I met with a loving and caring couple who had been married for about 25 years. I had cared for the wife during her courageous battle with breast cancer over many years. The cancer had spread to the liver, and it was obvious that our treatments were not working. With each visit, the patient was accompanied by her devoted and caring husband. Despite the pressures of his profession, he never missed a clinic appointment to be with his wife. I was taken by surprise when she said, "Dr. Ed, tell me how long I'm going to live now that the cancer has spread to my liver and the treatments are not working." As is my usual practice, I asked her why this question was important. She laughed, smiled at her husband, and said, "I need to know this so that I can max out all his credit cards so that there's nothing left for the second wife!" This was one of the funniest comments I have ever heard, and her husband and I could not contain our laughter.

I think that during times like this, humor makes us human. It strips away the façades of rank and privilege and makes us realize that at the end of the day, we are simply people with needs, people who want to be validated and acknowledged, and people who want to leave a legacy.

So despite the bleakness of a cancer environment and despite the seriousness of the hospice environment, these individuals bring a joy and a lightness that is beyond belief.

Laughter and humor play a role in dealing with serious illness. It can provide us with a refuge, not to avoid problems or deny their seriousness, but as a way to release anxiety and balance distress with healthful, positive feelings. Laughter and humor may not eliminate pain, however, it provides an effective and meaningful release to help relieve suffering and make troubles easier to bear.



Finding Humor: Where to Begin?

- Seek out humor you enjoy
- Create a humor kit for yourself or a friend
- Spend time with pets and children
- Take a laughter break with TV, movies, books, home videos
- Surround yourself with friends you enjoy and can laugh with
- Find the humor in everyday things: cartoons, bumper stickers, puns, billboards

Nutrition Questions & Answers

By Jacalyn See and Devin Moore, Registered Dietitians

Q. If someone does not eat meat or finds that cancer treatment affects the taste of meat, what are some alternative sources of protein?

A. Many people find the taste of meat unappetizing during or after cancer treatment or choose not to eat meat. Not eating meat is okay as long as you get protein from other sources, including:

- Fish
- Eggs
- Shellfish
- Cheese, cottage cheese
- Poultry
- Nuts, peanut butter
- Milk
- Legumes (dry beans and peas)
- Yogurt
- Soy foods

Some people find the taste of meat more appealing when it is mixed with other foods in a casserole, stew, stir-fry or chili. Flavor can be enhanced by using condiments such as soy sauce or barbecue sauce. Some experimenting may be necessary to find new tastes that appeal to you. If the odor of meat is the cause, try protein foods eaten cold or at room temperature such as tuna salad, deviled eggs, cheese or cold meats.

Q. What can I eat to raise my energy level? I'm so fatigued all the time.

A. Fatigue is the most common side effect of cancer and treatment, affecting 60 to 90 percent of people with cancer. There are many reasons why people experience fatigue, and poor or inadequate nutrition may be just one of the factors. Some tips to help with this issue include:

- eat on a regular schedule
- eat at least three meals a day or small meals more often
- have snacks between meals
- have a balance of carbohydrates and protein with foods like cheese and crackers, bread with peanut butter, cereal with milk, egg with toast
- drink plenty of fluids - dehydration can cause weakness

Check with your health care provider about other ways to manage your fatigue such as ensuring proper rest, recommendations for activity,

controlling pain and/or depression, managing side effects of treatment, and addressing any other factors that may be causing fatigue.

Q. I may experience bone loss because of my cancer treatment. Should I be concerned about getting osteoporosis?

A. Individuals who may be at risk for bone loss and osteoporosis include women who experience menopause due to their cancer treatment, anyone who takes steroids (prednisone, dexamethasone) or aromatase inhibitors (anastrozole, letrozole, exemestane), and men with prostate cancer taking a leutinizing hormone-releasing hormone (LH-RH) agonist (Lupron, Zoladex). One way to prevent osteoporosis includes getting 1200 to 1500 milligrams (mg) calcium with 400-800 international units (I.U.) vitamin D daily in your diet. That is about the same as four cups of milk. In addition to dietary guidelines, try to incorporate a weight-bearing exercise, such as walking, and resistance exercise with small weights or resistance bands, several times a week to help minimize bone loss. Talk with your doctor about medications or dietary supplements that may be recommended.

Sources of Dietary Calcium

It is important to eat good dietary sources of calcium throughout the day to ensure adequate absorption. Though some foods contain calcium and vitamin D, the two do not have to be eaten in the same food or at the same time.

Dietary calcium

- Milk or yogurt
- Cottage cheese
- Cheese
- Spinach or other greens
- Dried beans
- Rhubarb
- Dried figs

Calcium-fortified* foods

- Breads or cereals
- Pasta
- Orange juice
- Energy bars
- Tofu
- Soy or rice milks



**Fortified means one or more nutrients were added that weren't originally there. Look for foods that specifically note they are fortified with calcium.*

One Tough Cookie

by Sarah A. Christensen



Madison - 1st grade



Hailey - 1st grade

Did You Know?

- You can donate blood every 56 days.
- Each **whole blood** donation can help as many as three people.

The blood collected at a Mayo Clinic Blood Donor Center or through a donor drive is vital in helping patients who need lifesaving transfusions. When you donate blood, you are giving back to your community.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call:
Rochester
507-284-4475
Florida
904-953-6516
Arizona
480-301-6142

In 2002, Christine Hindt, 37, was six weeks into her third pregnancy when she began to wonder why her clothes were already getting a bit snug. At a routine prenatal check, an ultrasound revealed the cause — twins! Identical twin girls, it turned out. Christine, her husband, Jim, and their 12- and 16-year-old daughters, were thrilled to learn the news.

Because her pregnancy was considered “higher risk” due to her age and that she was expecting twins, Christine routinely had ultrasounds at her prenatal checkups.

Madison, and her sister, Hailey, were born five weeks early but weighed a strong 5 pounds, 11 ounces and 4 pounds, 14 ounces, respectively. The girls thrived until, shortly after their first birthday, Madison became ill with cold-like symptoms that lingered for more than a month. It was at a pediatric visit with her sister that the doctor noted how lethargic Madison seemed compared to Hailey.

Tests were ordered and a tumor was found on Madison’s kidney. Two days later she was in surgery. Early indications were a Wilms’ tumor, an uncommon but treatable childhood

cancer. Instead, surgery revealed the diagnosis of **rhabdoid sarcoma (RTK)**. This is a rare and relentless cancer and Madison was given only a 20 percent chance of survival. Hailey, being an identical twin, also underwent screening ultrasounds to rule out any indications of the cancer. Pediatric oncologists designed a treatment plan for Madison that included chemotherapy and radiation therapy following her surgery in order to address the fast-growing cancer.

“Madison had a very aggressive and rare type of malignancy. She tolerated her therapy very well, and her parents were wonderful team players in terms of helping her fight, and in terms of working with the physicians to do what we needed to give Madison her best chance at a cure,” says Carola Arndt, M.D., Mayo Clinic Department of Pediatric Hematology and Oncology.

For the next eight months, Madison and her parents stayed at Saint Marys Hospital (SMH) in Rochester, Minn. Madison had an intensive in-patient chemotherapy schedule in addition to 13 radiation therapy treatments. There would be a few days at a time when Madison would be well enough to go home, but she always ended up back in the hospital. Christine and Jim learned how to give her injections to increase her **white blood cells**. It was a very intense time for the entire family.

Due to the strong support the Hindts’ received from family, friends, their church and nearby communities, they never had to leave Madison alone in the hospital, even with three other children at home. The Hindts live in a rural area between the three towns of Spring Valley, Grand Meadow, and LeRoy, Minnesota. Jim operates the Hindt Funeral Homes, one located in each of those communities, and was the recipient of food, offers to watch the kids, visits to the hospital, and the list goes on and on. A benefit pancake breakfast was organized and people lined up for three blocks for the fundraiser. The event enabled

Jim and Christine the financial flexibility to be at the hospital with Madison.

Madison required many blood transfusions, since her **immune system** was so weakened from the aggressive **adjuvant chemotherapy**. Christine vividly remembers spending Christmas Eve in the pediatric **infusion therapy** unit as Madison received yet another lifesaving transfusion.

Mayo Clinic physicians and Madison's parents wanted to watch her condition closely. CT scans and full examinations were scheduled every three months. Madison became so used to the routine that she knew to extend both arms upwards in the classic blood draw position, and did so without a tear. Eventually routine checkups were moved to every six months. Now, she is followed annually with an ultrasound and other tests to check for aftereffects of the chemotherapy and radiation treatments "It is always a thrill to see Madison back for long-term follow-up and see her grow up!" says Dr. Arndt.

"Thanks to the excellent care Madison received at Mayo Clinic, as well as to the many blood donors that unselfishly donated their blood, Madison is happy and healthy," Christine says. She reflects on how her experience as the parent of a very sick child has tremendously influenced her work at Mayo Clinic in Rochester. She now focuses more on how to help parents and



Madison during treatment with her loving sister, Hailey.

pediatric patients. While working in Parking and Transportation, she and her team coordinated with Social Services to distribute parking passes for families to help ease the cost of frequent visits to the clinic buildings and the hospitals.

Working with the child life team at Saint Marys Hospital, the parking and transportation team also hosted a huge pediatric fair with games, food and prizes for pediatric patients and their families.

Another, more recent effort Christine initiated has been in her current role as Coordinator of Mayo Clinic Volunteer Services. The goal is to provide a book to all children receiving care at Mayo Clinic's T. Denny Sanford Pediatric Center on the sixteenth floor of the Mayo Building. Mayo Clinic volunteers donated 3,600 books through a book drive in an attempt to meet the needs of the hundreds of patients seen on Mayo 16 weekly. The book donation program has been hugely successful and the need for childrens' books is constant.

The only evidence today of what Madison Hindt faced before her second birthday are the scars from her surgery and the curly hair that grew back after chemotherapy. She is now a healthy, active and outgoing 7-year-old, though one inch shorter than her protective twin sister. Madison shows great compassion to her family, her pets and her many friends. She loves to ride her bike, excels in school, and is simply "one tough cookie" according to her mom.



The Hindt sisters at Christmas time 2009.

Back row,
left to right:
Kiersten, Jamie.
Front row,
left to right:
Madison, Hailey.

To donate books for toddlers through pre-teenagers, call 507-284-5520 or drop them off at Mayo Clinic Volunteer Service, Rochester campus, Siebens 14. Each book can bring a smile and a wonderful diversion to a sick child.



Cancer Terms

Adjuvant chemotherapy

Chemotherapy used along with surgery or radiation therapy.

Immune system

The complex group of organs and cells that defends the body against infections and other diseases.

Infusion therapy

A method of putting fluids, including drugs, into the bloodstream. Also called intravenous infusion.

Osteoporosis

A condition that is marked by a decrease in bone mass and density, causing bones to become fragile.

Rhabdoid Sarcoma

A malignant tumor of either the central nervous system (CNS) or the kidney. Malignant rhabdoid tumors of the CNS often have an abnormality of chromosome 22. These tumors usually occur in children younger than two years.

White blood cell

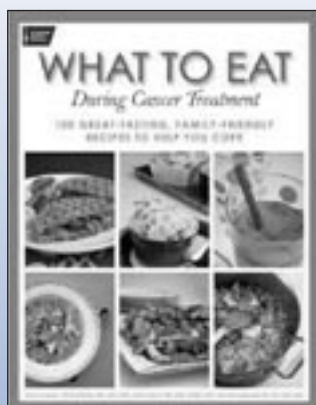
A type of immune cell. Most white blood cells are made in the bone marrow and are found in the blood and lymph tissue. White blood cells help the body fight infections and other diseases. Granulocytes, monocytes, and lymphocytes are white blood cells. Also called leukocyte and WBC.

Whole blood

Blood that contains all parts of the blood including red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets in plasma. This is the type people usually donate.

Definitions obtained from www.cancer.gov. Defined terms are in bold in the newsletter.

Book Review



What To Eat During Cancer Treatment: 100 great-tasting, family-friendly recipes to help you cope

American Cancer Society, 2009. 158 pp. ISBN-13: 9781604430059, \$19.95

Eating well during and after cancer treatment is an important part of taking care of oneself. The American Cancer Society's new cookbook, *What To Eat During Cancer Treatment: 100 great-tasting, family-friendly recipes to help you cope*, provides healthy recipes geared toward specific side effects including nausea, diarrhea, constipation, sore mouth and difficulty swallowing, taste alterations, and unintentional weight loss. The recipes are arranged by color-coded symptom icons for easy reference and include nutritional information. The authors also provide advice for the caregiver, suggestions for substitutions and leftovers, a list of kitchen staples, and tips for dining out.

Finding What You Need: Support is Out There

By Jeri Lensing and Angela Young, American Cancer Society Patient Navigators

A new cancer diagnosis often means patients, family, and caregivers need to find a source of support for the cancer journey. Individuals with cancer and those who support them may have very different needs, and often both benefit from having an outside source of support.

Support can come in many ways but, in any form it allows you to talk about your feelings and develop skills to manage the changes in your life. Official support groups that meet face to face often come to mind first; however, if one is not available, there are other options.

American Cancer Society programs include:

- **Cancer Survivors Network:** an online support group that is safe and secure to use, and works well for those who have a rare type of cancer or who can't or prefer not to meet face to face.
- **Look Good...Feel Better:** programs for men and women to help individuals manage skin changes and hair loss due to cancer treatment.
- **Man to Man:** a face-to-face support group for prostate cancer patients and their families.
- **I Can Cope:** educational programs for people facing cancer, either personally or as a friend or family caregiver, which offers information and answers to many cancer topics through community classes as well as online modules.

Other sources include:

- **Mayo Clinic's Living with Cancer blog:** an online forum for anyone who has been touched by cancer to share their thoughts, feelings, or reflections as a way to support each other. www.mayoclinic.com/health/living-with-cancer-blog/MY00850
- **CancerCare:** a national non-profit organization that provides online and telephone support options. Online support is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week from a licensed social worker at www.cancercare.org or by calling 800-813-HOPE (4673).

- **Imerman Angels:** a non-profit organization that carefully matches, and individually pairs, a person with cancer with someone who has the same type of cancer. Cancer caregivers (spouses, parents, children and other family and friends) also receive one-on-one connections with other caregivers. Call 312-274-5529 or go to www.imermanangels.org/.

The health care system can be difficult to maneuver on your own, but there is help. The American Cancer Society (ACS) Patient Navigator Program offers personalized support from trained staff to help you stay on track with your treatment and care.

While at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, stop by the Stephen and Barbara Slaggie Family Cancer Education Center in the Gonda Building, street level, to meet the ACS patient navigators, Jeri Lensing and Angela Young. You can also contact them by calling 507-266-9288.

At Mayo Clinic in Arizona, visit ACS Navigator, Jill Lovill, in the Patient Health and Education Library on the concourse level in the clinic or call her at 480-301-5990.

For more information on all ACS programs and services or to connect with a patient navigator in your area, call 800-227-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.



Jeri Lensing



Angela Young

Calendar of Events

September

19 *Join the Journey: Breast Cancer Awareness Walk*

Mayo High School
Rochester, Minn.
www.jointhejourney.us

26 *PurpleStride Rochester 2010*

Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
Rochester Community Technical College
Rochester, Minn.
www.pancan.com
email: Linda Skovbroten at
Skovbroten@msn.com

October

2 *Women's Cancers 2010: Merging Science and Care*

Siebens Building
Mayo Clinic
Rochester, Minn.
507-266-4886

2 *Minnesota Light the Night Walk*

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
Lake Phalen Regional Park
St. Paul, Minn.
763-852-3041
www.lightthenight.org

16 *Making Strides Against Breast Cancer*

American Cancer Society
Rochester, Minn.
507-424-4601
makingstrides.acsevents.org

November

4 *Florida Light the Night Walk*

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
The Jacksonville Landing
Jacksonville, Fla.
904-332-6414
www.lightthenight.org

6 *Making Strides Against Breast Cancer*

American Cancer Society
Tempe Beach Park
Tempe, Ariz.
602-952-7519
makingstrides.acsevents.org/phoenix

13 *Arizona Light the Night Walk*

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
Tempe, Ariz.
801-519-6600
www.lightthenight.org

Living with Melanoma – Science to Survivorship

Saturday, July 24, 2010 • 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. • The Doubletree Hotel Minneapolis Park Place • 1500 Park Place Boulevard • Minneapolis, Minn.

The Melanoma Research Foundation and Mayo Clinic Cancer Center along with the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Oncology Hematology Professional Association present a free day of melanoma education dedicated to melanoma patients and the people who support them. This educational event for patients, families and caregivers, will highlight risk factors, staging, and therapies, along with lymphedema and the patient's perspective.

Registration: Free (\$20 suggested donation to cover cost of meals)

Registration deadline: July 19, 2010 online (after July 19th please call for registration information) For registration information, contact Karen Osif at: 800-673-1290 or email: education@melanoma.org

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together newsletter provides educational information for cancer patients, their family, caregivers and friends. Physicians, staff and cancer patients write the articles.

To submit story ideas, provide feedback or unsubscribe, call 507-266-9288 or e-mail canceredprog@mayo.edu.



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