

FOCUS

ON HEALTH, WELLNESS & SAFETY

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KINDNESS - PASS IT ON

The philosopher Aesop who lived from 620 BC to 520 BC had it right when he said the now famous words: No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted. It seems that not only does committing random acts of kindness make people feel good, scientific evidence shows they result in significant health benefits.



*It is difficult to give away
kindness, because it keeps
coming back to you.*

Cort Flint

A recent survey of 3,000 volunteers of all ages asked how they felt when they did a kind act. The survey showed a clear cause-and-effect relationship between helping and good health. The researchers concluded that helping contributes to the maintenance of good health, and it can diminish the effect of diseases and disorders both serious and minor, psychological and physical. The volunteers in the study testified to feeling a rush of euphoria, followed by a longer period of calm, after performing a kind act.

This feeling, which the researchers

called “helper’s high,” involves physical sensations that strongly indicate a sharp reduction in stress and the release of the body’s natural painkillers, the endorphins. This initial rush is then followed by a longer-lasting period of improved emotional well-being.

Even sharing a smile with someone else is good for you. Smiling increases the serotonin levels in your brain that enhance happiness. And the recipient of your smile also experiences a rise in the natural anti-depressant serotonin.

If you have any doubt about the benefits of acts of kindness consider this: If you were kind to five people and each of these people were kind to five people and so on, in just 10 days 19 million people would be the recipient of kindness.

Source: Random Acts of Kindness website

*Kindness in words creates
confidence. Kindness in
thinking creates profoundness.
Kindness in giving
creates love.*

Lao-Tzu

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STROKES - TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

“High blood pressure is one of the leading risk factors for stroke, but fewer than one in four hypertensives in Canada have their blood pressure under control. Reducing someone’s systolic blood pressure by 10 millimetres of mercury reduces their chance of having a stroke by 40 per cent”, says Dr. Mike Sharma, medical director of the Ottawa Hospital’s Stroke Centre.

Vancouver Sun,
June 15, 2006

You’ve heard the expression that *time is money*, but when you’re dealing with a stroke, thoughts about money go right out the window. The faster you are treated the better your odds are of limiting or reversing the brain damage that can be caused by stroke.

Signs of stroke

Signs of stroke are generally the same for men and women. Symptoms can come on suddenly or can fluctuate over several days. Any of the following signs or symptoms of stroke should be investigated:

- weakness or numbness of the arm or leg on one side of the body
- facial droop
- dimness or loss of vision, particularly in one eye
- difficulty speaking or trouble understanding speech
- sudden severe headache with no known cause
- unexplained dizziness, unsteadiness or sudden falls, particularly with any of the other signs.

What is a stroke?

A stroke is an injury to a part of the brain. It happens when something goes wrong with the flow of blood to the brain. When an artery to the brain is blocked or bursts, the blood supply to a part of the brain is cut off. If the blood flow is cut off for more than a few hours, that part of the brain may be permanently damaged. Different parts of the brain control different body functions. For example, some parts of your brain control your ability to move your arms or legs. Other parts control your ability to talk or to understand speech. When a stroke damages your brain, the injured part of the brain is unable to send messages to the part of

the body it used to control.

Don’t wait before calling for help

Stroke victims often wait too long before getting help—on average about 15 hours too long. If you can get to medical services immediately, your chances of recovery are greatly improved. Ideally you want to be at the hospital within the first hour after your symptoms start.

If you suddenly can’t talk or you go numb on one side of your body, ask yourself, *Is this normal for me? Is this how my body usually acts?* If you answer *no* to these questions, that’s when you need to take action.

Don’t wait to see if the symptoms go away. Don’t lie down to rest or sleep. There is a three-hour window following a stroke when certain medications can be given to some patients to reverse or minimize the effects of a stroke.

Also, do not let pain be your guide. It’s possible not to have any pain with a stroke. With heart attacks, people often rush to the hospital because they are experiencing crushing pain in their chest. With stroke, there may be headache and there may not be any kind of pain at all. Symptoms vary from person to person, so know all the signs of stroke.

It’s okay to call an ambulance

It is best not to drive yourself to the hospital if you think you may have had a stroke. Your level of alertness on the road may be impaired and your judgment may be off. If you can, bring a person in with you right away who has been with you during your symptoms. That person is a valuable source of information for the health care professionals and can help avoid delays in your treatment by answering questions or providing consent for treatment quickly, if need be.

Source: Canadian Health Network and Canadian Heart and Stroke websites

GAMBLING IS GROWING AND SO ARE THE PROBLEMS

Each year about three-quarters of all adult Canadians spend money on some form of gambling, and do so without problems. However, just over one in 20 were, or had the potential to become, problem gamblers, according to the 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey.

In the past 10 years, Canada has experienced a widespread expansion of gambling. From casinos to scratch-and-win cards, it is easier to gamble today than ever before. With an explosion in the number of casinos, sports betting, slot machines in pubs and bars, telephone betting and gambling over the internet, there are more opportunities to gamble. And as the opportunities increase, so does the number of people dealing with gambling addictions.

Most people are able to gamble without risking a psychological addiction. Just as many people can have a glass or two of wine with dinner, so can they buy a lottery ticket, visit a racetrack, or spend an evening playing bingo. For others, the ticket, visits and evenings spent wagering are like a money pit into which they end up tossing their entire life's security, and sometimes that of others.

According to Statistics Canada, one of four people whose gambling included video lottery terminals (VLTs) were at-risk or problem gamblers, confirming the much-reported notion that VLTs are the "crack cocaine" of gambling. Those who bought only lottery tickets had the lowest chance of becoming problem gamblers.

Constant gambling and excessive spending can take its toll in many facets of life, particularly personal and family finances, as well as an individual's health. Half of all problem gamblers reported that their gambling caused

difficulties in relationships with family or friends. Four in 10 obsessive gamblers (42%) reported a high level of stress in their life, compared with 23% of gamblers who reported no problems.

About 18% of problem gamblers reported that they had contemplated suicide in the year prior to the survey, six times the proportion (3%) of non-problem gamblers.

Source: Statistics Canada, The Daily, Canadian Health Network website



Warning Signs of Possible Problem Gambling

Finances

- ◆ recent or ongoing money problems, such as unpaid bills and mounting debt
- ◆ white collar crime (bad cheques, embezzlement)

Relationships

- ◆ secrecy, distance
- ◆ less time for family and friends
- ◆ signs of stress, confusion, anger at home
- ◆ friends, relatives, teachers, co-workers express concern
- ◆ missed commitments at work, home, school

Mental Health

- ◆ depression
- ◆ extreme mood swings
- ◆ nervousness, anxiety, restlessness
- ◆ emotional outburst (rage, jealousy, despair)
- ◆ suicidal thoughts

Physical Health

- ◆ loss of appetite and sleep
- ◆ digestive problems, irritable bowel syndrome
- ◆ high blood pressure or hypertension
- ◆ back and neck pain

Gambling Behaviors

- ◆ preoccupation with gambling
- ◆ increasing amounts of time and money spent gambling
- ◆ failed attempts to quit or cut back
- ◆ gambling with borrowed money
- ◆ not keeping to a spending limit
- ◆ gambling to win back losses ("chasing")
- ◆ confessions of guilt
- ◆ loss of control

Source: New Brunswick Dept. of Health

FAMILY WELLNESS

*Kind words can
be short and
easy to speak,
but their
echoes are
truly endless.*

Mother Teresa
1910-1997

Staying healthy is in your hands

According to research published in the *Lancet* in July 2005, hand-washing with regular soap is the best way to prevent infectious diseases of all kinds. Hands spread an estimated 80 percent of common infectious diseases like the common cold and flu. For example, when you touch a doorknob that has the flu virus on it and then touch your mouth, you can get sick. But these disease-causing germs slide off easily with good hand-washing technique. Research shows that antibacterial soaps offer no benefit over regular soaps in preventing common illnesses and their widespread use can cause antibiotic resistance. The mechanical action of hand-washing - rubbing your hands together with soap and water - breaks down the tiny bits of grease, fat and dirt on your hands that bad germs cling to.

Canadian Health Network Healthlink,
March 15, 2006

Stressed out? Exercise is best

Stress is not only a risk factor for heart disease, cancer, and a variety of additional serious health concerns ... it could also make you crave sweets. In a recent study of stressed and unstressed people, participants had access to four bowls of snacks: potato chips, nuts, grapes, and M&Ms. All the participants ate the same amount of chips and nuts, but those who said they were under a great deal of stress consumed five times more M&Ms and four times fewer grapes. The researchers theorized that, like people who are depressed, the high stress people went for the candy because high-carb foods increase the feel-good. However, while sweets might improve your mood temporarily, they don't reduce stress and they contribute to

other health problems. The best way to manage stress? Exercise. A recent Danish study showed that people who exercise for 15 to 20 minutes a day are 61 percent less likely to feel highly stressed than those who are sedentary.

Men's Health Magazine

Gambling revenues increases

The prevalence of problem gambling has risen significantly over the past 15 years. In 1999-2000, the net profit to governments at all levels from gambling was \$5.7 billion. By 2004, that profit had risen to \$6.2 billion, more than the net profit to government of tobacco and alcohol combined (\$5.9 billion). Canadian governments at all levels depend on revenues from gambling and it is likely that investment in gambling facilities will be increased. But the social, economic and health impacts for Canadians are just beginning to emerge; they must not be ignored or minimized.

Senate of Canada, *Out of the Shadows Report and Recommendations Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*

Environment and breast cancer

World wide more than one million women die from breast cancer every year. Yet less than one out of 10 women diagnosed with breast cancer has a genetic predisposition. The January 2006 report, *State of the Evidence: What is the Connection Between the Environment and Breast Cancer?* (breastcancerfund.org/) summarizing more than 350 recent studies in breast cancer research cites exposure to radiation and synthetic chemicals as possible causes.

Alive Magazine, April 2006

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