



Laughter really is the best medicine

In your daily life, don't forget to laugh. After all, it's good for you — no joke. Humor can lighten the anxiety and stress load that comes with living during a pandemic, or just life in general. Having a good sense of humor is an excellent way to relieve stress and anxiety and bring back a sense of normalcy, especially during the turbulent times of these past few years.

LET'S EXPLORE THE SCIENCE OF LAUGHTER

"Amusement and pleasant surprises — and the laughter they can trigger — add texture to the fabric of daily life," says Janet Gibson, author and professor

of cognitive psychology at Grinnell College. Beyond that, laughter has many powers that can enhance our physical and mental well-being:

- **Physical power** by activating neural pathways of emotions like joy and laughter to improve your mood, physical, and emotional response
- **Cognitive power** by recognizing and resolving the absurdity of a surprising behavior or event, such as seeing the lighter side of things
- **Social power** by creating bonds and increasing intimacy with others
- **Mental power** by producing positive emotions that lead to living meaningful lives and thriving

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Next, let's focus on the social power of laughter, and the bonds and increased intimacy it creates with others.

Laughing is contagious. The most common human social signals are laughing, smiling, and talking. Years ago, psychologists from the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) found that laughter is 30 times more likely to occur in the company of others than when one is alone. Recently, the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) at the University of California, Berkeley explored the connection between social connection and happiness. They referenced several studies exploring people's strategies for happiness, and they found a main common denominator — social connections do lead to happiness.

This ties in perfectly to the Right Tribe, one of the Blue Zones Project's Power 9® principles. Find your people — those who support your positive healthy behaviors — like being social and laughing more.

Take inventory of who you hang out with and do your best to proactively surround yourself with the right family and friends.

Here are some examples of laughter, social interaction, and positive healthy behaviors:

- If you want to eat healthier, commit to following the Plant Slant rule with a friend. Adopt a meatless Monday and share recipes
- If you want to be more physically active, commit to the Move Naturally rule by joining a Walking Moai. It's a group of people who walk together at least once a week to points of interest throughout the community
- If you want to laugh more, find what movies, books, television shows, etc. make you laugh and share them with others. They may also enjoy a laugh, too, and share something back
- If you want to go to a community volunteer event, but you don't want to sign up alone, bring a friend and volunteer together

Here in Monterey County, there are plenty of ways to connect and laugh more.

Head over to the Blue Zones Project — Monterey County's website or Facebook page for a full schedule of their monthly events. Get involved with your church. Attend a community volunteer event. And remember, Aspire can help. Contact your Member Advocate, and they'll be glad to help you find clubs and social resources.



“Amusement and pleasant surprises — and the laughter they can trigger — add texture to the fabric of daily life.”

— Janet Gibson, author and professor of cognitive psychology at Grinnell College



Silver&Fit® 2022 benefit

The Silver&Fit® Healthy Aging and Exercise program is designed to support every unique member.

WANT TO WORK OUT AT HOME?

Answer a few online questions about your fitness level and goals to receive a personal exercise plan, including suggested workout videos. You will have access to view 8,000 plus on-demand videos through the website and mobile app digital library, including the Silver&Fit Signature Series Classes®.

Home Fitness kits are also available to supplement your at-home workouts. You may select up to two kits per benefit year, at no additional cost. Available kits include:

- Fitbit® Wearable Fitness Tracker kit (must be ordered as the first of the two kits)
- Garmin® Wearable Fitness Tracker kit (must be ordered as the first of the two kits)
- Pilates kit with a pilates ball and hand towel
- Beginner Strength kit with 2-pound dumbbells and exercise bands
- Intermediate Strength kit with 3-pound dumbbells and exercise bands
- Advanced Strength kit with 5-pound dumbbells and exercise bands
- Beginner Swim kit with swimming goggles and a kickboard
- Advanced Swim kit with aquatic resistance gloves and a pool float
- Beginner Yoga kit with a mat and hand towel
- Intermediate/Advance Yoga kit with a yoga strap and two yoga blocks

PREFER TO WORK OUT AT A FITNESS CENTER OR GYM?

Membership in this program allows access to local participating fitness centers, like the two premier fitness centers in the county, the Montage Wellness Centers in Marina and Salinas.

Also, new this year is access to discounted rates at three premium fitness centers in the area — Club Pilates in Pacific Grove, Pure Barre in Carmel-by-the-Sea, and CycleBar in Carmel.

Visit www.silverandfit.com or call (877) 427-4788 to get started.



Access to doctors



Most of us feel exceedingly fortunate to live in beautiful Monterey County, but we share a problem faced by many communities throughout the country. We have a shortage of doctors and other medical professionals. The reasons are many, both national and regional.

The U.S. is experiencing an increasing shortage of doctors, as the entry of new doctors from medical schools and training programs is failing to keep up with retirements. Also, there is data that tells us that individual doctors are trending toward lower productivity. Remember those Marcus Welby docs of yore, who worked five very long days a week, and were available at all hours of the night and weekends? Today's professionals quite reasonably seek a more balanced life, wanting to spend time with family and their other interests. All of this is in the face of an aging population and advances in medical care that allow for more and more medical conditions to be addressed by complex and intensive therapies.

Monterey County shares these issues and more. Our population of doctors tend to be well established, with a good deal of experience; which also means they are more likely to retire. We also face very significant challenges in recruiting new replacements. We all experience the high cost of living that makes it increasingly difficult for the next generation to afford housing here. The average new doctor leaves training with more than \$200,000 of educational debt, many with two to three times that amount. Sadly, even some of our newly

recruited doctors have moved away to find more affordable locations. This same high cost of living, of course, compounds the problem. The inability of our children to afford housing contributes to the increasing average age of the Monterey County population, and the related higher than average medical needs.

On the positive side, our community-owned health systems have been addressing this issue aggressively for more than a decade, assisting private practices with recruitment and forming Salinas Valley Medical Clinic and Montage Medical Group. These community-owned multi-specialty group practices provide stable employment opportunities for often debt-burdened young doctors.

Mindful of these very real regional challenges, we at Aspire Health Plan are committed to being your partner in always getting you the high-quality care you want and need in a timely fashion. If you need assistance getting an appointment, please reach out to Member Services for assistance at (855) 570-1600.

Don't miss out



Great news. If you are an Advantage or Plus plan member, you have access to over-the-counter (OTC) medications and products as part of your health plan. **Don't forget to use this allowance each quarter, before it expires.**

Each quarter you can order up to \$30 of OTC products from the Aspire Health Plan OTC catalog. The OTC catalog was mailed to you at the beginning of the year, and it is available online at www.aspirehealthplanotc.org. In the catalog, you will find a variety of products to choose from such as bandages, cold and allergy medicines, pain relievers, vitamins, and many more.

3 EASY WAYS TO ORDER

1. Go online, create a secure login to view your balance, and place and track your order. www.aspirehealthplanotc.org
2. Complete the order form included with your OTC catalog and mail it in.
3. Call (855) 657-7546 (TTY: 711)
Monday–Friday, 5 a.m.–8 p.m. PST.



Your healthy actions deserve a reward

As a member of the Aspire Health Plan family, your health is important to us. When you take steps to live a healthy life, we think that deserves a reward. That's why we are happy to continue our Aspire Rewards program in 2022. Aspire Rewards allows you to earn rewards, just for taking care of your health.

Here's how it works. When you complete a qualifying healthcare activity, let us know. We'll ask you to provide a few details, and then we'll send you a catalog of more than 100 popular over-the-counter items to choose from. It's that simple.

Qualifying healthcare activities will differ based on individual needs. Not all members will qualify for all rewards.

QUALIFYING ACTIVITIES IN 2022

Annual Wellness Visit or Health at Home Visit

Instead of just going to the doctor when you are feeling ill, the Annual Wellness Visit is intended to help you maintain your optimal health. This planning session with your primary care doctor includes a discussion of how you can improve your health and avoid or reduce the effects of certain conditions. **All members qualify to earn rewards for completing their Annual Wellness Visit.**

Breast cancer screening

Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. At this time, a mammogram is the best way to find breast cancer for most women. And mammograms help detect breast cancer early, when it is smaller and easier to treat.

Diabetes eye exam

The early stages of diabetic retinopathy don't cause vision changes and you won't have symptoms. You may not know your eyes are damaged until the problem is very bad. Only a diabetes eye exam can detect the problem and steps can then be taken to prevent the retinopathy from getting worse.



Your member experience is everything to us

Continually improving your health plan experience is our top priority. To ensure that we are meeting your needs, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) sends an independent survey to a random selection of Aspire members every year.

You may be one of the members selected to receive this survey. Please know that your feedback is important to helping us improve your experience through the health plan.

We hope that you are fully satisfied with the services and benefits from Aspire Health Plan. If not, please call (888) 652-0921 to let us know how we can serve you better or help you understand how to best use your benefits.

Remember, your survey response is anonymous, so if you have an issue, it is best to call Aspire Health Plan directly, before receiving your survey. We cannot improve if we do not hear from you.

Aspire strives to provide great customer service. Yet we may not always give you the answer you expect due to health plan features and other rules. Use this survey to tell us how we treated you with the courtesy and respect you deserve. We want to hear the good stuff too.

Thanks for entrusting us with your care, and remember to always call when you need assistance.



BLUE ZONES APPROVED

Banana oatmeal cookies

Mix oats with bananas and a handful of other ingredients to make these delicious cookies that are naturally sweet and perfect for a healthy treat.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups old-fashioned oats
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 ½ teaspoon unsweetened cocoa powder
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
4 medium-sized ripe bananas
½ cup chopped walnuts

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Line a baking sheet with parchment or spray with non-stick spray.
2. Use a high-power blender to process oats to the consistency of flour. Pour into a mixing bowl and add baking soda and spices.
3. Blend bananas until completely smooth. Add to oatmeal mixture along with the nuts (or other dried fruit) and mix until combined.
4. Drop 2-tablespoon balls of dough onto the baking sheet, spacing well. Dip the scoop or spoon into water to keep the dough from sticking. Use lightly moistened fingers to flatten each cookie. Bake for 15 minutes.
5. Cool cookies on a wire rack and store them in an airtight container.

www.aspirehealthplan.org/members-newsletters
Share your thoughts: feedback@aspirehealthplan.org



Like us on Facebook:
facebook.com/aspirehealthplan

For accommodations of persons with special needs at meetings call (855) 570-1600 (TTY users call 711). Other providers are available in our network. We are open 8 a.m.–8 p.m PT Monday through Friday from April 1 through September 30 and 8 a.m.–8 p.m. seven days a week from October 1 through March 31 (except certain holidays). H8764_MBR_Newsletter20_322_C



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FRIEND

WE LOVE YOUR REFERRALS. The greatest compliment you can give Aspire is a referral to your friends and family. Thank you for your membership in Aspire Health Plan. Help us grow by sharing Aspire with the people you care about.