

December 2007

# RM News & Notes



## Columbia County Board of Commissioners Risk Management Department

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### Laughter is the Best Medicine

Laughter can actually reduce the levels of chronic stress in your body, enhance your lifespan, boost immune system function, protect your nervous system and your sanity, and give your endocrine system a much-needed rest.

So, rent a video of your favorite comic or funny movie, find some good jokes or funny videos, or seek out your favorite friends to reminisce and laugh about the “good old days”. Whatever your sense of humor, indulge in healthy activities that “Tickle your funny bone”.

There’s no doubt that laughter feels good, but is there real neurophysiology behind it and what can you do about it? In a paper being presented in an American Physiological Society session at Experimental Biology 2006, Lee S. Berk of Loma Linda University, reports that not only is there real science and psychophysiology, but just the anticipation of the “mirthful laughter” involved in watching your favorite funny movie has some very surprising and significant neuron-endocrine / hormone effects.

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### Message from the Risk Manager

Too much stress can be a problem at any time of the year, but especially during the holidays when we add so many activities and responsibilities to the normal load. And don’t you just love it when you feel like you are almost at the breaking point and some well-meaning soul walks in with a “60-Second Solution” or better yet, one of those cute, little stress balls and suggests that this will solve all your problems? My first instinct (I have resisted so far) when someone gives me a stress ball is to throw it at them – aiming right between the eyes. If I could get away with that, it might actually make me feel better, but at least for me, stress balls just make cute paperweights. I haven’t been able to find a “quick-fix” but there are some things that you can do to help deal with the stress of your everyday life. While there is no perfect solution for everyone, take a look at some of the suggestions in this newsletter and see if there are any that you might be able to use. Some come from experts, internet sites and other resource materials while others are simply common sense and personal experience. Hopefully, you will find something you can use. Have a Safe and Happy Holiday!

*Darlene*

## Safety Officer News and Notes

### Reducing Holiday Stress

The holidays are supposed to be a joyous time, but for many of us they are a time of stress. We experience the worry and stress so common during the holiday season. We feel stressed because we believe we should feel good during the holidays, not worried or anxious. Being worried and anxious only increases our levels of stress! The holidays are a time when our schedules and routines change dramatically. Our expectations of what the holidays should be very often set us up for failure.

#### Here are some simple tips for keeping stress in check:

**Be realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect to be joyous. Remind yourself that there will be good times and bad times. Feeling nervous, stressed, sad, angry or other negative emotions is normal. Feeling bad doesn't mean the holidays are ruined.

**Give yourself time.** We try to pack so much into the available hours that we are constantly rushing. The pressure of the "clock ticking" just adds more unnecessary stress to the situation. Expect things to take longer than usual and allow for the extra time. Don't have any extra time? Try to cut out non-essential things. Accept that everything doesn't have to be deliciously fresh and homemade, spotlessly clean and shining, beautifully decorated and the perfect gift to be wonderful and appreciated. Write down on a piece of paper everything you think you need to do for the holidays. Include all the parties, all the travel, all the gift buying all the cards, all the cooking. Then read the list out loud. Now ask yourself, "If this were any other time of the year, would this list of tasks seem reasonable?" Answer honestly. If your answer is no, then look at that list again and start crossing things off.

**Share** – No matter your situation, there are always those who have a greater need. Share yourself and be compassionate. Things as simple as letting the harried mom get ahead of you in the grocery line or taking a little bag of cookies to the shut-in down the street. Donate a toy to a needy child or collect the loose change in your house and let the kids drop it in the Salvation Army kettles. Anytime you help others, you feel better.

**Unplug** – Technology has invaded our lives to the point that it sometimes seems we are becoming slaves to it rather than technology serving us. Give yourself some "down" time when the cell phone, e-mail, blackberry and every other "technological wonder" is shut off.

**Quiet Time** – Take "Unplug" one step further and actually give yourself some quiet time. And not just quiet to the exterior noises, but also quiet in your mind. Give yourself a few minutes where you refuse to think about the problems, to-do lists, activities or any of the other daily stressors. Be still, be quiet, and be calm: Close your eyes relax and breathe.

**Sleep** – Studies have shown that most people are sleep deprived and it gets worse around the holidays. Any situation is easier to handle if you've had a good night's rest. Listen to your body. You need to eat right, and exercise. You must make time for yourself. Being sick and stressed will not make the season brighter.

**Get Physical** – Physical activity is a great way to relieve stress. It's not even necessary to spend an hour at the gym to get the benefits. Just go for a walk. Even a few minutes up and moving can have tremendous stress-relieving benefits.

**Schedule Some Unplanned Time** - Regularly set aside a day or an evening when you can take some time off from planned activities. Turn the TV off and just spend some time together with family or friends. Roast marshmallows in the fireplace and make S'mores. Play Monopoly or Scrabble. Put together a jigsaw puzzle. Go for a walk around the neighborhood and look at the Christmas lights. Just enjoy being together. But, if "togetherness" is your big stressor: schedule this unplanned time to spend alone. Read a book, wrap up in a blanket with a cup of hot chocolate, play with a pet, take a nap, etc.

We all want the holidays to be a happy time. By having realistic expectations and not overextending, you will keep your stress levels in check. Remember, a stressed out you is not a happy you. So take some time to focus on yourself this holiday season. Doing so will make the holidays more joyous for you and those around you. You simply can not do it all. Moderation will keep you from becoming a scrooge.

## Stress Reliever

### A Car for Christmas

Danny had recently passed his driving test and decided to ask his clergyman father if there was any chance of him getting a car for Christmas, which was yet some months away. 'Okay' said his father 'I tell you what I'll do. If you can get your grades up to 'A's' and 'B's', study your bible and get your hair cut, I will consider the matter very seriously.'

A couple of months later Danny went back to his father who said 'I'm really impressed with your commitment. Your grades are excellent and the work you have put into your bible studies is very encouraging. However, I have to say I'm very disappointed that you haven't had your hair cut yet.'

Danny was a smart young man who was never lost for an answer. "Look dad, in the course of my bible studies I've noticed in the illustrations that Moses, John the Baptist, Samson and even Jesus had long hair.' 'Yes, I am aware of that' replied his father 'but did you also notice they walked wherever they went?'

## Up Coming Events

Each program is advertised by Risk Management and is available to employees of Columbia County Board of Commissioners and the city employees of Grovetown and Harlem. Additionally, the Defensive Driving Courses may be attended by immediate family members of employees, on a space available basis, for a nominal fee.

**Pre-registration is required.**

For additional information or to register contact Risk Management. 706-312-7475

**Safety Review Board      January 10, 2008**

**Defensive Driving  
Course – 8 hour      January 31, 2008  
February 28, 2008**

**Defensive Driving  
Course – 4 hour      February 7, 2008**

**CPR/AED/First Aid      January 15, 2008**

**County Office Closed      December 24, 2007  
December 25, 2007  
January 1, 2008  
January 21, 2008**

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## Newsy Notes

**Yule** - A very old Germanic feasting time, celebrated when the first snow came. A harvest type of feast, fellowshiping with neighbors for the last time that year before the hardship of winter set in.

**Yule log** - Burning of fires and bonfires was an important part of the Yule festivals. When Christmas replaced Yule festival the Yule log carried over. It had to be lit 12 days before Christmas by a piece of last years Yule log and last until Christmas where it was put out and a piece saved for lighting the next year's log.

Merry Christmas 

