

Vision can affect child's grades

A child needs many abilities to succeed in school. Good vision is a key. It has been estimated that as much as 80 percent of the learning a child does occurs through his or her eyes. Reading, writing, chalkboard work and using computers are among the visual tasks students perform daily. A child's eyes are constantly



Dr. Rebecca Winck Bateson has a private practice at 678 Philadelphia St. and practices optometry with Dr. Mike Yuhas and Dr. Greg Caldwell.

in use in the classroom and at play. When his or her vision is not functioning properly, education and participation in sports can suffer.

The school years are a very important time in every child's life. All parents want to see their children do well in school and most parents do all they can to provide them with the best educational opportunities. But too often one important learning tool may be overlooked — a child's vision. As children progress in school, they face increasing demands on their visual abilities. The size of print in schoolbooks becomes smaller and the amount of time spent reading and studying increases significantly. Increased class work and homework place significant demands on the child's eyes. Unfortunately, the visual abilities of some students are not performing up to the task.

When certain visual skills have not developed, or are poorly developed, learning is difficult and stressful and children will typically:

- Avoid reading and other near vision work as much as possible
 - Attempt to complete work, but do so with a lower level of comprehension or efficiency
 - Experience discomfort, headaches or fatigue
 - Act out with poor behavior in the classroom
- Some children with learning difficulties exhibit specific behaviors of hyperactivity and distractibility. These children are often labeled as having "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder" (ADHD). However, undetected and untreated vision problems can elicit some of the very same signs and symptoms commonly attributed to ADHD. Due to these similarities, some children may be mislabeled as having ADHD when, in fact, they have an undetected vision problem. If your child has been diagnosed with ADHD or is having difficulty in school, seek an eye doctor that specializes in children's vision.

Because vision may change frequently during the school years, regular eye and vision care is important. The most common vision problem is nearsightedness. However, some children have other forms of refractive error like farsightedness and astigmatism. In addition, the existence of eye focusing, eye tracking and eye coordination problems may affect school and sports performance. An eye doctor specializing in children's vision can detect these problems.

Eyeglasses or contact lenses may provide the needed correction for any vision problems. However, a program of vision therapy may also be needed to help develop or enhance vision skills.

The best way to monitor your child's eye health and maintain good vision is by scheduling an exam with a doctor who specializes in pediatric vision.

If you have any questions, e-mail Becca@indianaeyecare.net.



ERIC HAYNES pretended to pull his smile muscles up during a guided laughter session before Dr. Tophers Stephenson's Proactive Pain Solutions class.

Take away your pain with a dose of laughter

By SAM McMANIS
Sacramento Bee

Talk turned serious — painfully so, at times — during the two hours of a Proactive Pain Solutions class at Sacramento's Mercy Midtown Medical Building.

Dr. Tophers Stephenson, sitting ramrod-straight in the physician's archetypal white coat, knitted his brows and focused his empathetic brown eyes on three patients, one using a cane and another wearing a back brace. Chronic pain not only can affect the physical, the patients explained, it can decimate quality of life.

At one point, patient Eric Haynes couldn't help but cry. "I'm just trying to deal with the pain and keep going," he told the group. "I don't want to do anything. ... But I don't want to give up on life, either."

On it went, sad stories of lives turned upside down, while Stephenson and Mercy behavioral health coordinator Pat Hanson offered soothing words and concrete coping skills. But near the end of the session, Stephenson looked at his watch and decided what everybody needed was a good laugh.

Seriously, Stephenson, who specializes in physical medicine and runs the spine program at Mercy in Sacramento, also has become something of an adherent to a trend in integrative medicine known as laughter yoga, which promises to do for the psyche what bikram yoga does for muscles.

So he tells the group members to gird for a brief but restorative session of mirth. He has them extend an imaginary string with both hands across their mouths and says to raise it a bit and laugh.

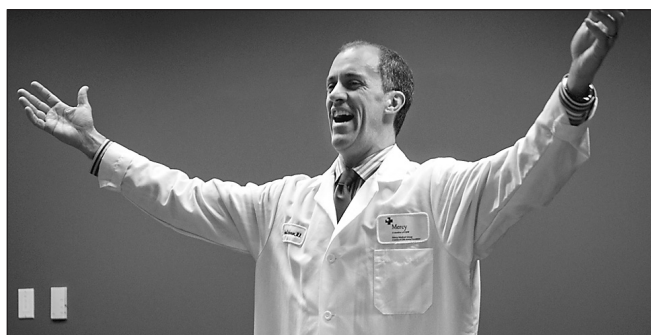
"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha ..."
"OK, that was a nice and easy warm-up," Stephenson said. "I don't want to hear belly laughs yet. Just keep your teeth closed and do two more."

"Ha-ha-ha ..."
"Now, I want you to really let it rip, OK?"
"HA-HA-HA-HA-WHOA-HA-HA-HA ..."

Laughter reigned. The whole vibe of the room changed from sorrow to joy, at least for a minute. Everyone was smiling and chuckling after Stephenson finished and dismissed the group.

"This has really helped me," said Haynes, who is unable to work because of a chronic back condition. "And it's fun to do."

Research looking at the connection between mind and body suggests that repeated doses of laughter can indeed lead to positive physical changes. Building on the lay research by 1970s best-



STEPHENSON led a session of laughter during his Proactive Pain Solutions class. Stephenson, who went to clown college before he went to medical school, teaches laughter as a way to manage stress and physical pain.

selling author Norman Cousins, who eased his autoimmune disease by watching "Candid Camera" episodes, doctors at Loma Linda University in Southern California have documented the effects of laughter in double-blind studies.

In a paper presented at the April meeting of the American Physiological Society, they found that the hormones beta-endorphins (which elevate mood) and human growth hormone (which builds immunity) increased significantly in patients exposed to "mirthful laughter."

Another study by the same doctors found that laughter reduced three key stress hormones — cortisol, epinephrine and dopac — by 38 percent to 70 percent. Significantly high levels of those three hormones have long been linked to compromised immune systems.

Stephenson was won over even before he became familiar with the scientific literature. In a break before starting medical school in the late 1990s, he attended clown college (Mooseburger University in Oklahoma) and graduated with honors. Using his alter ego, Bobo Doodlemeier, Stephenson started a clown-care unit at the University of New Mexico Children's Hospital.

"When you get down to it, laughter promotes all kinds of good endorphins, which helps reduce pains and promotes deep breathing. A lot of these folks who are hurt just don't breathe well. Their breathing pattern is (shallow). Laughter gives you little squirts of dopamine, the feel-good reward chemical in the brain," Stephenson says.

Erin Cote and Shannon Plaster, a Sacramento couple who attended the school, recently launched a business. It's called ULaugh, and it offers classes and workshops at local hospitals, businesses and even has a weekly telephone laughter therapy session.

They've made the rounds at places such as Sutter General Hospital in Sacramento, Mercy San Juan Pulmonary Rehab Center in Carmichael, the California Department of

Health and the American Lung Association of California.

When they worked with respiratory patients at Mercy San Juan, Cote and Plaster said they could see a noticeable change in the mood and look of patients after the session.

"People, when they walk in, are in the mode of their chronic illness," Plaster said. "They look a little tired, run-down, their energy is low. By the end of the class, they are beaming."

Cote says skeptics sometimes infiltrate their laughter sessions. Mostly, she said, they win the skeptics over.

"I find that when there's tension in the air, laughter relieves it," she said.

Outside of a medical setting is a different dynamic for the couple. They've done sessions with company human-resources departments — a tough crowd to crack up.

So, aside from helping people with chronic pain, does laughter help with work stress or other psychic worries?

"We stress the habit of noticing and laughing with it or at the situation," Plaster said. "I wouldn't promote sarcasm, but we do promote laughing at yourself. Don't take yourself so damn seriously."

"How are you going to find a solution to your problems from a state of stress? Your options are limited. You're not relaxed enough to think creatively."

"If you laugh at it, it allows you to create some distance from the problem."

The practitioners are quick to take their own advice. Stephenson said he laughs when he rides his bicycle to work.

"People think I'm really crazy," he said.

Cote and Plaster seem to spend half their time cracking each other up.

But there are times when they, too, must work hard to laugh in the face of stress.

BRIEFS

CLASSES

■ **AARP Driver Safety Program** provides adults age 50 and older with a driving refresher class. Dates and times vary. For more information, call Excelsa Health at (877) 771-1234.

■ **Active Parenting of Teens**, Center for Family Life, 125 N. Fifth St., Indiana (724) 463-8595.

■ **Beginning Yoga**, 5 p.m. Wednesdays at IRMC, (724) 357-8088.

■ **Breastfeeding is Best** teaches about feeding baby and pumping and storing breast milk from 9 to noon Saturday at IRMC Outpatient Building. Registration is required. For information, call (724) 357-8088.

■ **Clear the Air** is a one-session program that can give you the tools you need to get prepared, take action, stay motivated and quit smoking for good. For more information, call IRMC at (724) 357-8088.

■ **Cyber CPR** is a new way to learn adult CPR and first aid through the American Red Cross. Participants are issued a user name and password and a link to the training website. They are then able to take the knowledge portion of the course online at their own pace. The CPR and first aid skills are then tested in the classroom with an instructor. The online portion must be completed before attending the skills session. For more information or to register, call the Indiana chapter at (724) 465-5678 or e-mail bburns@iccarc.org.

■ **Eat Well for Life** is a four-week lifestyle improvement program promoting wellness and long-term weight management through balanced nutrition, cooking demonstrations and other hands-on experiences. The next class starts Thursday. Call IRMC at (724) 357-8088.

■ **First Step Joint Replacement Education** is for patients anticipating a hip or knee replacement surgery at Excelsa Health. This orientation program should be scheduled as close to the surgery date as possible. Morning or evening sessions are available monthly on a rotating basis. For more information, call Excelsa Health at (724) 689-0100.

■ **HOPE** is a four-week lifestyle management program focusing on how to have stronger bones to live a longer, healthier life. The program provides an overview of osteoporosis, education on healthy nutrition, physical exercise, medication options, stress management and more. The next class begins Aug. 16. Call IRMC at (724) 357-8088.

■ **Introduction to Disaster classes** teach how American Red Cross fits in when there is a disaster and how you can help your community. For more information, call the Indiana chapter at (724) 465-5678.

■ **Let's Talk Parents! (Infants and Toddlers!)** is a class facilitated by Kathy Moore, executive director at the Center for Family Life.

Learn how to tame temper tantrums, boost your child's self-esteem and discuss the developmental stages your baby or toddler is going through. Cost is \$5, and registration is required. For more information, call IRMC at (724) 357-7075.

■ **Look Good Feel Better** is for women undergoing

cancer treatment to learn how to cope with the appearance-related side effects of treatment, thus regaining a sense of self-confidence and control over their lives. This group meets the second Monday of the month at the Arnold Palmer Pavilion, Mountain View Medical Park, in conjunction with the American Cancer Society. Call (888) 227-5445.

■ **Parent-Infant Massage** is offered the first and third Friday of every month through IRMC for moms, dads, babies and toddlers. Parents will learn the art of infant massage and will be guided through instruction on how to massage their own babies. Buy five classes for \$20 and get one free. For more information, call (724) 357-7075.

■ **Shelter Operations** teaches the process of opening and properly managing a shelter through the American Red Cross. Call the Indiana chapter at (724) 465-5678.

■ **Working with Total Diversity**, through American Red Cross, teaches how to assist service providers in providing for the needs of the changing populations in the communities served and how to overcome prejudices and stereotypes within communities. For more information, call the Indiana chapter at (724) 465-5678.

■ **Yoga for Health** shows how yoga is suitable for most adults because of the non-strenuous nature and how it can be useful to help relieve symptoms associated with some conditions, such as cancer, arthritis and heart disease. Classes meet at 10:30 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays through IRMC. For information, call (724) 357-8088.

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS

■ **Adoption Support**, Catholic Charities, provides meetings based on need. For information, call (724) 463-8806.

■ **Breast Cancer Support Groups** are available through IRMC. On the first Thursday of the month, women ages 20 to 50 meet at the Women's Imaging Center Library, with pizza and refreshments served. At 6:30 p.m. every third Thursday, a group meets at IRMC at Chestnut Ridge, Conference Room, Blairsville.

On the last Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m., a group for all interested women meets at the Women's Imaging Center Library.

For more information, call (724) 357-8081.

■ **Breast Cancer Education and Support Group** meets from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at Excelsa Health Westmoreland Hospital. For more information, call Excelsa at (877) 771-1234.

■ **Chronic Pain Support Group** meets at 6 p.m. Thursday through IRMC. For more information, call (724) 357-7075.

■ **Doctor Dad** is a child health care and safety series that works to enhance a father's ability to care for the health and safety of his infant or toddler. Registration is required. For information, call IRMC at (724) 357-7075.

■ **Fibromyalgia Support Group** will meet from 6:15 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at Excelsa Health Westmoreland Hospital. For information, call (877) 771-1234.

Poor Oral Hygiene & Heart Disease

Researchers found a relationship between frequency of brushing and cardiovascular disease and inflammation markers in the blood. They think it is the inflammation associated with gum disease that causes problems by spreading system-wide and contributing to the build-up of plaque in the arteries. One study surveyed 12,000 people and recorded how often they said they brushed their teeth. In the eight-year follow-up, people who "rarely or never brushed" had a 70% increased risk of heart attack, stroke or other cardiovascular event, over those who brushed their teeth twice a day.

By Rob Kasisky, R.P.H.

401 North 4th St., Indiana
(Beside The Dairy Queen)
Phone 724-349-9170
Toll Free 1-888-463-9170

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