

Newsletter 5 - August 17, 2012

Dear Patients,

I am just finishing up my summer vacation: a week at the beach with my wife, daughters, and their spouse/significant others. The only things missing are my dogs. The relaxing week has given me time to reflect, and I thought I'd share some of my reflections with you. Staying connected to people and passions is an important aspect of staying healthy. In fact, staying emotionally connected is of biologic importance. According to Dr. Lodge, in his book *Younger Next Year*, we evolved as social pack animals, and imprinted in our genes is a survival instinct that depends on being part of a group – our family, friends and our passions. Isolation is fatal.

Humans are mammals and, as such, have evolved a third part of their brain: the limbic brain. It sits on top of our reptilian brain, which is the portion that coordinates breathing, eating, and fight or flight reactions. The limbic system integrates and controls the balance of how we think. As many of you have heard me say: how you think is how you feel. Our thoughts, positive or negative, create our optimism or pessimism. Keeping the limbic system healthy is crucial to our overall health. This requires good rest, pursuing meaningful activities, good nutrition and regular exercise.

Earlier this year, my family and I lost our first Old English Sheepdog. Baron was almost 10 years old and, rather suddenly, deteriorated from a previously unrecognized cancer. Baron was a loved member of our family. I am sure many of you have experienced the loss of a pet. It gave me pause to realize how fortunate we were to have him, and indeed fortunate to have what we have in general. Although Baron could never be replaced, the love of our remaining rescue dog, Cutha, helped with our grief, and the addition of a second rescue Sheepdog later in the year, Silver, made it easier as well. Our dogs are one of our passions. They add to the health of our limbic system, they bring us joy and purpose in our empty nest. Below is something my wife ran across and shared with me when Baron died.

**THINGS I LEARNED FROM MY DOG:**

1. Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.

2. Allow the experience of fresh air and wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.

3. When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.

4. When it’s in your best interest, practice obedience.

5. Let others know when they have invaded your territory.

6. Take naps and stretch before rising.

7. Run, romp and play daily.

8. Eat with gusto and enthusiasm.

9. Be loyal.

10. Never pretend to be something you are not.

11. If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.

12. When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close and nuzzle them gently.

13. Thrive on attention and let people touch you.

14. Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.

15. On hot days, drink lots of water and lay under a shade tree.

16. When you’re happy, dance around and wag your entire body.

17. No matter how often you are scolded, don’t buy into the guilt thing and pout. . . . run right back and make friends.

18. Bond with your pack.

19. Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.

20. Long after you are gone, remain a memory in your master's dreams.

On another note, as in past years, included in your retainer fee is your **annual flu shot**. Please consider getting one this year. Immunizations will begin after Labor Day and continue to the end of the year. To get your vaccine, stop by any weekday of your choice between 8:30 am and noon, or it can be administered at an upcoming visit. Try to get the vaccine, if possible, before Thanksgiving.

Wishing you good health,

Harry Oken, M.D.