

# The Benefits of Hugging

Monday (Jan. 21) is National Hugging Day. Maybe you didn't know there was such a designation for the calendar.

It was created by the Rev. Kevin Zaborney from Caro, Michigan, in 1986. He thought of the idea while studying psychology at the University of Michigan. He said he realized that there was "no such day to observe the very important act of hugging one another."

After his idea was published in *Chase's Annual Events*, it immediately went global.

"I was tremendously surprised," Zaborney said. In fact, he didn't expect it to go anywhere. He thought his idea would be mocked. But today, National Hugging Day is observed worldwide. It is officially recognized by the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

National Hugging Day was initially created for family and friends to hug often and freely with one another. Reasonable care should be taken with those who are either uncomfortable with public affection or their reaction to a hug is unknown. In those situations, it is advised to ask before hugging.

National Hugging Day is always celebrated on Jan. 21 – chosen because it is the midpoint between Christmas and Valentine's Day – a time of the year when statistics show people feel an emotional low.

Research shows that hugging (like laughter) is effective at healing both physical and emotional issues. Studies indicate that hugging ...

- Builds trust and a sense of safety.
- Causes the body to release oxytocin, the "feel-good" hormone.
- Lowers stress and anxiety.
- Boosts memory.
- Lowers cortisol levels, benefitting moods, heart health and weight.
- Reduces pain and increases pain tolerance because it helps relaxation.
- Improves self-esteem because it helps us feel valued and loved.
- Increases serotonin levels improving mood and a feeling of happiness.
- Strengthens the immune system by stimulating the thymus gland that regulates the production of white blood cells.

(more)



Virginia Satir, author and therapist, known especially for her approach to family therapy, said this: “We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth.”

So, for those of us in Life Care and Century Park, we have a special opportunity to use some hug therapy with our residents. Besides that, hug your parents, hug your spouse, hug your kids, hug your friends, hug your pet.



But don't hug a squirrel; Monday is also Squirrel Appreciation Day – and I have nothing to say about that.

– Beecher Hunter