CANNED LAUGHTER NOT FUNNY
NEW YORK — For millions of North Americans, the inhaling of nitrous oxide has long been considered a quick, risk-free high. Now a University of California professor has come along to show the unamusing side of laughing gas. In treating his patients, Robert Layzer found that habitual use of nitrous oxide can cause nerve disorders, damage to the spinal cord and other negative effects. Laughing gas, he notes, is a “probable cause of neurological disorder.” His patients, all of them heavy and longtime users of nitrous oxide, suffered a variety of ill effects, including numbness, tingling in the arms and legs, a loss of balance, an inability to hold objects and “an electric shock sensation when they bend their necks.” In more than one case, a patient was “totally unable to walk or stand.” Concludes Layzer: “Nitrous oxide does not deserve its reputation for being a safe and harmless drug for recreational purposes.”

EAR OF FLYING
NEW YORK — You may be asking for trouble — and a hearing aid — if you travel by airplane. When a plane makes its descent to land, it turns out, the changes in the cabin’s air pressure can cause permanent damage to your ears. “Awareness is relatively new that pressure changes can cause inner-ear problems,” says Dr. Maurice Miller, professor of audiology at New York University. If your ear malfunctions and doesn’t compensate for the air pressure changes in the cabin, the resultant pressure on the delicate bones and tissues may bring on inner-ear barotrauma or aerotitis. In its mildest form, aerotitis causes a feeling of pressure in the ear and some pain and hearing loss which usually stops shortly after the plane has landed. In many cases, according to Miller, the symptoms can be more serious. “The passenger will have severe pain in the ear, experience a noticeable hearing loss or a ringing sensation in the ear, have the disturbing sensation of hearing his own voice amplified and distorted, and suffer vertigo.” Barotrauma is even more serious. “This problem is normally not reversible,” says Miller. “Ruptures of the inner-ear membranes are often untreatable and can result in a total hearing loss.”

DO YOU COME HERE OFTEN?
BOSTON — Making love can make your memory go blank. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, the disorder — called transient global amnesia — is caused by a lack of blood in the brain. It is usually noticed after physical exertion and is only temporary. In the report, Dr. Richard Mayeux of the Neurological Institute describes a 64-year-old woman and a 47-year-old man who lost their memories after sex with their spouses. “After sexual intercourse with her husband,” Mayeux wrote of the woman, “she suddenly experienced confusion and disorientation and could not recognize her surroundings.” About the second case he said, “His wife found him in a state of confusion wandering around the house just after completing sexual intercourse.”

EACH FRIDAY NIGHT, BEAUREGARD AND THE BOYS GET TOGETHER TO PLAY POKER AND KNOCK BACK SOME NITROSAMINE
OTTAWA — The beer you drink may be spiked with a substance that can leave you with more than a big belly. According to the federal health protection branch, certain Canadian beers — it won’t say which — contain traces of a cancer-causing chemical. Nitrosamine, a chemical naturally produced during the malting process, has been found to exist in some Canadian brands. The chemical has proven to be cancer-causing in animals, but according to a report by the federal health branch, it has not yet proven dangerous to humans. “There’s no reason, however,” the report emphasizes, “to believe that it doesn’t hurt humans.”

WHAT’S UP, DOC?
CHICAGO — Doctors are no friends of yours if you want to stay healthy, says a medical man of 28 years’ experience. Dr. Robert Mendelsohn, a Chicago professor of medicine, says doctors are dangerous to your health, hospitals can kill you, and baby formula is “the granddaddy of junk foods.” In a recent book, Mendelsohn says he has become a “medical heretic” — he no longer believes in modern medicine, which he likens to a church with its priests and acolytes, rituals, liturgies and sacrifices. He describes it as a church whose god is death and whose religion is based on faith, not scientific facts. He urges readers to stop trusting doctors and to start asking questions.