

Health Notes by Evelyn Ames Laugh for the Health of It! Part 1

Did you know that by the time a child reaches nursery school, the child laughs about 300 times a day, whereas, adults laugh an average of 17 times a day ("Science of Laughter" *Discovery Health*). How come we laugh so few times? In a two-part article, the effects of humor on physical, social, and emotional health are discussed, with recipes for incorporating more laughter into one's daily pattern of living.

Research studies show that exposure to humor has healthful affects, such as lowering levels of the stress hormones, cortisol and epinephrine. Male subjects in a study watching humorous video had more beta-endorphins and more human growth hormone in their blood than the control group. "The benefits of laughter are similar to exercise," says researcher Lee Berk of Loma Linda University. In short, Berk says, "We should become more serious about laughter."

"Laughter is a universal medicine." Bertrand Russell

One thing researchers notice about laughter is that it is something we seldom do alone. "Laughter is 30 times more frequent in social than solitary situations," says Robert Provine, psychologist and neuroscientist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

"Nothing is good or bad. It is thinking that makes it so." Shakespeare

The health benefits of humor include a reduction in stress, a lowering of blood pressure, an elevation of mood, a boost in the immune system, improved brain functioning, a connection to others, and a feeling of relaxation. Humor helps one feel good!

How does laughter affect the body?

- Laughter lowers blood pressure. People who laugh heartily on a regular basis have lower standing blood pressure than the average person.
- Humor changes our biochemical state. Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases infection fighting antibodies. It increases our attentiveness, heart rate, and pulse.
- Laughter protects the heart.
- Laughter gives our bodies a good workout. Laughter can be a great workout for muscles. It massages abdominal organs, tones intestinal functioning, and strengthens the muscles that hold the abdominal organs in place. It is estimated that hearty laughter can burn calories equivalent to several minutes on the rowing machine or the exercise bike.
- Humor improves brain function and relieves stress. Laughter stimulates both sides of the brain to enhance learning. It eases muscle tension and psychological stress.

"Every survival kit should include a sense of humor." Author Unknown

What are the social benefits of humor and laughter? "Humor binds us together, lightens our burdens and helps us keep things in perspective. One of the things that saps our energy is the time, focus and effort we put into coping with life's problems, including each other's limitations. Our families, our friends and our neighbors are not perfect and neither are our marriages, our kids or our in-laws. When we laugh together, it can bind us closer together instead of pulling us apart ("Science of Laughter" *Discovery Health Website*). Remember: Laughter is the shortest distance between two people. Humor unites us, especially when we laugh together. Laughter heals. Laughs and smiles are enjoyed best when shared with others.

"The art of medicine consists of keeping the patient amused while nature heals the disease." Voltaire

Check out these Humor web sites: http://www.thehumorcollection.org/health_articles.html
http://www.helpguide.org/life/humor_laughter_health.htm

"I realize that humor isn't for everyone. It's only for people who want to have fun, enjoy life, and feel alive." Anne Wilson Schaef