

January 2015 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Put a Smile on Your Face and Raise Your Endorphins

"Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy." Thich Nhat Hanh

The next time you step into an elevator and there are others on the elevator with you, turn around, smile and ask them "how goes it?" You might find that doing this gives you a boost! Of course, some people might look at you and wonder what gives but most often, they will smile back at you and respond. When standing in line at a grocery or department store, smile at those in line behind you and strike up a conversation. Smiling and chatting have positive physiological effects.

Smiling "activates the release of neuropeptides that work toward fighting off stress. Neuropeptides are tiny molecules that allow neurons to communicate. They facilitate messaging to the whole body when we are happy, sad, angry, depressed, or excited. The feel good neurotransmitters dopamine, endorphins and serotonin are all released when a smile flashes across your face as well. This not only relaxes your body, but it can lower your heart rate and blood pressure."

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/201206/there-s-magic-in-your-smile>." No one yet knows why our facial expressions influence our emotions as they seem to. The associations in our mind between how we feel and how we react may be so strong that our expressions simply end up reinforcing our emotions—there may be no evolutionary reason for the connection. Even so, our faces do seem to communicate our states of mind not only to others but also to ourselves." <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/smile-it-could-make-you-happier>.

Reported benefits of smiling: <http://longevity.about.com/od/lifelongbeauty/tp/smiling.htm>

- People are more likely to be drawn to people who smile compared to those with frowns and grimaces. "Smiling makes you appear more approachable. Interaction with others is easier and more enjoyable when smiles and laughs are shared, and these behaviours are contagious, making others feel better too, and make you a more appealing and attractive person to be around. This in turn will have a positive effect on your well-being." <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/7-benefits-smiling-and-laughing.html>
- Putting on a smile can help change a "downer" mood to an uplifting mood.
- A smiling person lightens up a room, changes the moods of others and makes things seem happier. Smiling is contagious.
- Become conscious that putting a smile on your face when feeling stressed may reduce your stress. When endorphins are increased, the stress hormone, cortisol, is reduced.
- Some researchers have found that smiling may boost the body's immune functions.
- Smiling helps a person stay positive about life!

Simple ways to smile more often: smile regularly; watch funny films, TV and theater shows; spend time with those that make you feel happy; and look for things that make you smile. When the sun shines in Bellingham, people do seem to be cheerier!

Hints for striking up conversations with strangers! Appear friendly (smiles do help); find a common ground; look interested in engaging in a conversation (people using their mobile phones are not likely to be receptive); find what a person's expertise is and ask questions about it; the right location helps (waiting in line at airports, stores, or sports events); and identify people in similar situations as you find yourself in. But, do sense when someone doesn't want to chat.

"It's surprisingly easy to talk to strangers and make new friends. All you need to do is make them feel comfortable and engage them on a topic that's interesting to them. If you listen, you end up learning a lot about different industries and various walks of life." <http://www.quora.com/What-are-some-tips-for-striking-up-conversation-with-total-strangers>

Smile: You're on Candid Camera!