



CONNECTIONS

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Laugh Long, Live Longer

Go Ahead, Give Yourself the Giggles!

Everyone can laugh - the very young, the very old, people who are handi-capped or ill, even people under great stress or sadness can often muster a chuckle. Medical professionals are now studying laughter's effects on healing and health - and it's not unusual to find "humour therapy" in some of the nation's most prestigious hospitals. Levity has even entered the workplace. Many companies are hiring "humour consultants" to train employees in how to lighten up. For besides its obvious effects of easing tension and adding fun, laughter has some important effects on health and the body.

Funny Facts:

- Laughing has a positive impact on bones and muscles as well as the respiratory, cardiovascular, immune and central nervous systems.
- Laughter is a good way to get cardiovascular exercise - even for those who are bedridden or in wheelchairs.
- Laughter increases the heart rate and stimulates circulation, helping

to clear fatty plaques out of the arteries, which reduces the risk of heart disease.

- Laughter lowers stress, relieves tension and reduces anger.

So, go ahead ... tell a joke, play with your children or grandchildren, visit a comedy club. You'll be having a good time and doing your health a favor.

Physical Benefits of Laughter:

You know about laughter's mental effects - it momentarily banishes feeling of anger, guilt and sadness, and it gives you that delicious feeling of "letting go." But you may not realize that laughter has physical effects as well - especially a good, long belly laugh that leaves you weak-kneed and gasping for air. The body benefits of a good laugh every day can lead to better overall health.

Examples:

- Releases muscle tension caused by stress
- Stimulates your brain to release pain-relieving chemicals
- Empties your lungs of stale air
- Exercises your heart
- Exercises the muscles in your chest, neck, face and abdomen



**LAUGH LONG,
LIVE LONGER!**

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Work Out Your Funny Bone

Laughter is great exercise. A good, long laugh deepens your breathing, works out your abdominal muscles, massages your internal organs and gets your heart pumping - just like a workout. It doesn't replace exercise, so don't pack away those walking shoes ... but do indulge in a funny movie, trading jokes with friends or reading the funny pages. It's good for you!

The Bigger the Laugh, The Better

According to renowned psychiatrist and humor researcher William F. Fry, MD, a big belly laugh gives you more health benefits than a refined giggle because it deepens your breathing, gets your heart pumping and encourages you to "let go" of tension.

Ways to Add Humour to Your Life

If you've had a bad day, you might have to go a bit out of your way for a laugh.

Ideas:

- Read the comics.
- Rent a funny movie or watch cartoons.
- Remind a family member of a funny story.
- Call a funny friend.
- Play a silly game with a group of friends.
- Put on a puppet show or play with your kids.
- Look through your high school yearbook and remember how far you've come.
- Make up a silly theme song about your day.

Laughter as Pain Relief

Pain research has shown that people's perception of discomfort - how much pain they feel - changes when they laugh. Studies involving rheumatoid arthritis sufferers revealed that pain was reduced when subjects were encouraged to laugh at jokes, comedy performances or humorous videos. In some cases, the pain relief was equal to that provided by medication. "Humour therapy", encouraging a chronic pain sufferer to laugh, doesn't just create a lighter

atmosphere. It can be a true boon to health.

Laughing Through the Tears

According to one recent study, humour during times of grief has mental health benefits. The study showed that widows and widowers who were able to give a heartfelt laugh while they talked about their spouses were better able to cope with grief. Some cultures put this theory into practice - at Irish wakes and New Orleans funerals, for example, sharing laughter and remembering good times are part of the ceremony.

The Power of Optimism

Are you the type to always "look on the bright side?" good for you! Studies have shown that people who have a positive outlook on life are more resistant to illness. If you're more likely to see the glass as half empty, don't despair. Making a conscious effort to brighten your outlook and "lighten up" has benefits, too - after "pretending" to think positively for a while, you might find yourself truly believing that things aren't so bad after all. Feeling down? Call a cheerful friend. In most cases, someone else's optimistic attitude will rub off on you.

Laughing on the Job

You might think there's no place for fun in a professional workplace. But the stress-reducing effects of laughter can be a great way to help reduce job-related tension. Here's how you can add some laughter to your workday:

Picture yourself on your favorite sitcom. When you're in a stressful situation, imagine how your favorite comedian would handle the problem.

Collect stress relievers. Wind-up chattering teeth, a rubber squeezable "stress toy", a foam clown nose - keeping fun objects around your desk and using them during the work day can help reduce tension.

Give yourself a morning laugh. Instead of watching the news in the morning or listening to talk radio during your commute, watch cartoons, tune in to a funny radio show or listen to a comedy tape.

More tips: Keep a joke-a-day calendar on your desk ... put a favorite funny picture in your workspace. Laughter just might be the key to good health. Make it your daily mission to have fun - your body will thank you for it!
