

Laugh Your Way to Better Health

The sound of laughter is more contagious than yawning and can cause joy and amusement to the moodiest of people. Laughter relaxes the body and reduces health problems, such as high blood pressure, strokes, arthritis and ulcers. Some research is proving laughter also reduces the risk of heart disease. Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases antibodies to prevent infections. It also improves our appearance. Laughter is a great workout for your abdominal area, including the diaphragm, respiratory tract, and facial, leg and back muscles. It also benefits the digestive process. A good, hearty laugh can burn enough calories equivalent to several minutes on the exercise bike. Laughter stimulates the part of the brain that enhances learning by easing muscle tension and psychological stress to keep the brain alert and retain more information. Humor can improve mental and emotional health by lowering stress and dissolving anger. Humor elevates your mood by laughing at yourself and finding humor in tough times, especially the little annoyances that can put us and everyone surrounding us down and depressed. Humor can help us shift the way we think and even makes things seem less overwhelming.

Here are some things we can do to improve our mood and mental health:

- Attempt to laugh at certain situations instead of getting angry
- Laugh to release pent-up feelings of anger or frustration
- Laugh to reduce tension
- Lower anxiety by envisioning a humorous situation

What is laughter?

Laughter is the psychological response to humor. There are two parts to laughter, gestures and the production of sound. When we laugh, both of these parts come together and healthy changes occur in our bodies. The purpose of laughter is to make and strengthen human connections. Laughter is more likely to occur when people are comfortable with one another. Laughter is a way of bonding within a group of people, which is why laughter seems to be contagious. Laughter can also be a sign of social behavior, a kind of "social signal" given that people are more likely to laugh in a group of people than when alone and not stimulated by human contact, both physical and emotional. Researchers are finding that certain parts of the brain are stimulated when laughing. The Limbic system has also been found to be stimulated during laughter.

Why do we laugh?

Laughter is most likely triggered when we find something humorous. Different age groups find different things to be more amusing at different stages of life. Infants and children seem to find everything funny. They are still learning about the world and the new environment that surrounds them. Pre-teen and teenagers usually laugh to avoid tension and awkward situations. This is the most insecure time in their life and humor can help teenagers cope as well as feel superior.