

Humor and Your Health

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Toss me a LAUGH line and make it quick!...humor and your health

Do people look forward to seeing you when they walk down the hall? Can they expect a light-hearted quip to brighten their day or a glum face making whiney noises? Listen to yourself. Do you find yourself complaining about how much you have to do and how bad administration is and...well, you get the idea. Want the cure? Laughter heals! Humor helps! Play energizes! Toss me a Laugh line and make it quick...it might even boost my immune system.

The idea that laughter and humor are good for our health is not new. Norman Cousins, trying to cope with pain from ankylosing spondylitis, an inflammatory disease, watched reruns of Candid Camera, old Marx Brothers films, and had people read humorous material to him. He found that ten minutes of belly laughter gave him two hours of pain free sleep. Blood studies of his sedimentation rate, a measure of the inflammatory response, which were drawn after his "laughter therapy," showed a cumulative positive effect. He had reasoned that if being in a bad mood makes people feel worse; perhaps, being in a good mood would make him feel better. His book, Anatomy of an illness, has become a classic in the humor in health movement.

Gelotology is the physiological study of laughter. This body of knowledge tells us that our bodies benefit from humor and laughter. Laughter exercises the breathing muscles, benefits the cardiovascular system by increased oxygenation, and promotes relaxation. Laughter helps control pain by distracting ones attention, reducing tension, and changing or reframing ones perspective. During episodes of laughter the blood pressure increases then lowers below the initial rate.

In a study at Loma Linda University School of Medicine, blood samples were drawn after subjects were shown humor videos. Results were compared to those of a control group. The mirthful experience appeared to reduce serum cortisol, dopac, epinephrine, and growth hormone. These changes are related to the reversal of the neuroendocrine and classical stress hormone response. Let's see an example of how this works. In times of stress, the adrenal glands release corticosteroids that are converted to cortisol in the blood. Increased levels of cortisol can suppress the immune system. If laughter reduces serum cortisol, it may diminish the chemical effects of stress on the immune system

Dr William Fry, a researcher of the physiology of laughter has called laughter, "internal jogging," giving our internal organs a workout. Dr Fry and Jerry Lewis both received awards at an American Therapeutic Humor Association meeting. (www.AATH.org) Watching Jerry Lewis perform, a few feet

away, brought back wonderful memories of how good it feels to watch a funny movie. We often find our one-liners in movies. Two of my favorites are: "I won't think of that today. I'll think of that tomorrow, at Tara" and "Toto, I don't think we are in Kansas anymore." Do you have a Laugh line? It is never to late to save your day from despair and pull yourself together to lighten and brighten a colleague's day.

When teaching customer service skills, I tell employees, "We don't pay you to be happy, just to fake it." This draws laughter and the point is, first you change the behavior, then you change the attitude. When you smile and act pleasant, soon you will feel better. Words have power and can be hurtful. We cannot feel free to say whatever we want. When corporate change causes fear and anxiety, casual, negative comments spread like a virus. Instead, try a Laugh line, something you tell yourself to alter your perception of a situation. It is this paradigm shift that helps us laugh. Tell yourself, "God has a sense of humor." Learn to laugh out loud at yourself. Develop your comic vision. Try reading bumper stickers and marquis of businesses who provide the public service of funny one-liners. Remember, "Life is a beach?"

Next time you feel grumpy and are tempted to freely share...consider that the one thing over which you have control is your attitude. To lighten up might just help you live longer. Remember that book with the catchy title? Don't sweat the small stuff and it's all small stuff. Laugh out loud and remember how good it feels. If you have a sense of humor, share it. We need your help. Plan to play. Play energizes. Remember the one liner from the days of computer punch cards? "Garbage in equals garbage out." Be careful how you fill your mind. Go to funny, positive movies. Read the comics. Instead of complaining, grab a laugh line and toss one my way, too. We need you...share your humor for our health

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