

LAUGH

*Silence and Laughter are the keys,
Silence within
Laughter without*

-Osho

for the HEALTH of it!



by Dr. Clifford Oliver & Dr. Caroline Meeks

Holistic medicine has long acknowledged the powers of Thought and Meditation to positively impact your life and your health. We would add to this the power of Laughter. Whether we are pleased, amused or lucky enough to feel the inclination to break out in an enormous belly laugh that brings us to tears, we are all aware of the fact that we feel better afterwards. We feel lighter, more relaxed, more energetic, and more able to take on the challenges of the day.

My philosophy is: "If I can laugh at it, I can live with it." -Earl Storm, Artist

LAUGHTER AS AN EXPANSION OF THOUGHT AND MEDITATION

Many great philosophers and holistic practitioners have realized the powers of Thought and Laughter. The number one foundational factor in the CHEK Holistic Lifestyle Coaching program is Considering Thoughts. Lao Tzu gave this practical advice: "As soon as you have made a thought, laugh at it."

We can create silence through meditation, and express the absolute joy of the present moment with laughter. Deep laughter can be used to create a state of focused relaxed concentration where the mind and the body begin to disappear. The laughter that resonates and radiates out from the very core of the belly is quite different from the chuckles that predominates modern society.

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HEALTH BENEFITS OF LAUGHTER

Dennis Lewis in his book, *Free Your Breath, Free Your Life*, suggests that there are several physiologic benefits to what he labels "The Laughing Breath." A good belly laugh is a source of cardiac exercise and promotes better breathing. Through the movements it generates throughout the body, it strengthens the breathing muscles in a natural way. It also helps clear the lungs of old air. Normal lung volume is approximately six liters. With each respiratory cycle, the average air exchange is approximately half a liter. With hearty laughter the volume of air expelled from the lungs is increased at least three times, resulting in increased oxygen exchange.

Many noted researchers in the field of psycho-neuro-immunology have written about the effects of mood on our health. In *Molecules of Emotion*, Candace Pert notes that "...the radical discovery we made was that every neuropeptide receptor we could find in the brain is also on the surface of the human monocyte. . . Immune cells also make, store, and secrete the neuropeptides themselves. In other words, the immune cells are making the same chemicals that we conceive of as controlling mood in the brain."

The Holistic Model of health embraces the concept of mind, body and spirit, but many people question or even scoff at the validity of the concept. In a recent review article, "Humor and Laughter May Influence Health IV, Humor and Immune Function," Mary Payne Bennett and Cecile Lengacher summarize the outcomes of several studies using a humorous stimulus including the following: periods of intense laughter are followed by relaxed muscle tone; humor appears to involve activation of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), but it also acts to buffer some of the actions of the SNS on blood pressure; laughter leads to increased heart rate, respiratory rate and oxygen consumption; exposure to a humorous stimulus decreased self-reported anxiety in subjects waiting to receive an electrical shock; students had increased relaxation, as measured by biofeedback, following exposure to a humorous stimulus; immune markers such as secretory IgA were increased after exposure to a humorous stimulus. Studies looking at the effect of laughter on immune function have indicated a significant relationship between the amount of laughter and change in immune function. In one study, only the subjects who laughed out loud demonstrated significantly increased immune function. Definitive large scale studies on the immune system have yet to be done, but the preponderance of studies to date do support the health-giving benefits of mirthful laughter.

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Proverbs 17: 22

LAUGHTER'S IMPACT ON PAIN

The positive emotion of mirth that is typically expressed with laughter has been consistently shown by scientific research to result in an improved threshold of and tolerance to pain, sometimes reporting improved sleep and requiring less medication. Laughter is a powerful

pain-reducing tool and certainly the least expensive.

Norman Cousins was one of the first popular writers to endorse humor and laughter as antidotes to pain and suffering in his landmark book, *Anatomy of an Illness*. The book notes that "Ten minutes of laughter allowed him two hours of pain-free sleep." He was diagnosed with Ankylosing Spondylitis, a rapidly progressing autoimmune disorder, in which the spine fuses and is usually very disabling. His solution was to check out of the hospital and into a hotel where he felt he laughed his way back to health.

"The true tragedy in life is not death but that which dies inside of us while we are still living."

-Norman Cousins

According to Nevo et al in *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, humor-related increases in pain tolerance and threshold appear to be quite robust, although the exact mechanisms are still not clear. It should be noted the effects appear to build up over time. The daily practice of any activity is what develops mastery of a subject.

Reporter: "Mr. Casals, you're 95 and the greatest cellist that ever lived. Why do you still practice six hours a day?"

Pablo Casals: "Because I think I'm making progress."

BRING HEALING LAUGHTER INTO YOUR LIFE

With laughter we may not need to practice for hours every day, but making time to envelop yourself in all of the benefits outlined in this paper by laughing is a prescription for increased well being. Set ten minutes aside upon awakening to do some light cat stretches and before even opening your eyes start to belly laugh, diving deeper into the core and becoming mindfully present. Children love to laugh, so if you are having challenges with daily laughter, visualize laughing with a child to help set the tone. Reduction of pre-surgery anxiety in children was studied by Vagnoli et al, and a marked reduction was demonstrated when humor via a clown was introduced prior to the procedure.

*Everybody's got a laughin' place,
A laughin' place, to go ho-ho!
Take a frown, turn it upside-down,
And you'll find yours I know ho-ho!*

-Walt Disney's *Song of the South*

Visit this website to put a song in your heart:

<http://www.songofthesouth.net/movie/lyrics/laughing-place.wav>

Laughter has many health related effects, some of them summarized here. How much joy do you want in your life? The choice is yours. Motion creates emotion. If you want to create a shift in mood, start moving your body!

*"It is bad to suppress laughter.
It goes back down and spreads to your hips."*

- Fred Allen

OUR PRESCRIPTION FOR MIRTH

Rx: Want more joy in your life? Follow our prescription and increase your level of wellness:

1 Start your day with a hearty belly laugh as a form of meditation. Repeat several times daily.

2 Make yourself a laughter cocktail, as needed. It's easy. Just take your two hands and imagine a shaker glass full of laughter in each. Pour one glass into the other several times. Then drink it. See what happens.

3 Join a Laughter Club. Laughter in groups is often contagious, with the laughter of a few spreading rapidly among the group. After group laughter exercises, participants in our Laughter Classes consistently report that they just seem to feel better...reporting mood elevation, relaxation, reduced stress...just peace.

4 Visualize laughter. As with Biofeedback techniques, you can create many of the same physiologic effects of actual laughter just by visualizing yourself in a mirthful state. Imagine yourself popping a potent laughter pill onto your tongue. Enjoy the burst of laughter that ensues.

*"I used to wait for a sign", she said, "before I did anything."
Then one night I had a dream,
an angel in black tights came to me & said,
"You can start anytime now."
Then I said, "Is this a sign?"
The angel started laughing and I woke up.
Now I think the whole world is filled with signs,
but if there's no laughter, I know they're not for me.*

*-Brian Andreas
(Story People, used with permission)*

DISCLAIMER

Laughter may not be suitable for everyone. Remember that laughter is a form of exercise with similar side effects. People suffering from uncontrolled seriousness might experience complications or may even die laughing. Side effects however, will always include warm fuzzy feelings, afterglow and miraculous new beginnings. Consult your physician if you have heart problems, high blood pressure or palpitations, as several extra hugs per day may be indicated for you.

"The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease." -Voltaire

It is our sincere hope that this article has brought a smile to your face, and that you will revitalize your life with the gift you give yourself: The Gift of Laughter! ■



Cliff Oliver, D.C., R.N., Certified Laughter Yoga Leader, is the HLC co-founder, teacher, and mentor and is in private practice specializing in phone consulting on lifestyle management and finding the underlying causes of dysfunction. He also utilizes adjustive techniques of the late great Robert Fulford, DO and can be reached at 858-272-2333.



Dr. Funshine, aka Caroline A. Meeks, MD, is a Pediatrician gone Comediatrician and a Certified Laughter Teacher through Dr. Kataria's School of Laughter Yoga. Having practiced traditional medicine for over 20 years now, and board certified by the American Board of Holistic Medicine, she has turned her attention toward prevention as a Health Educator. Dr. Funshine is an experienced and entertaining presenter and a faculty member for over 20 years at the University of Washington School of Medicine. Her current mission is to help adults find their inner child as a laughter life coach and through her Laughter Leader Programs. She is available to help you integrate laughter into your workplace setting or personal life: www.drfunshine.com or Phone 858-490-6288.

RESOURCES

Laughter Clubs

Dr Kataria School Of Laughter Yoga: <http://www.laughteryoga.org/>

World Laughter Tour: <http://worldlaughter.com/>

Organizations Exploring Laughter and Humor:

The Humor Project: <http://www.humorproject.com>

Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor:

www.laughterheals.org

Laughter Heals Foundation: www.laughterheals.org

Rx Laughter: www.rlaughter.org

Scientific Journals:

Humor and Health Journal

International Journal of Humor Research

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