

[IMAGE]

A Laughing Matter

By Editorial Staff

Everyone enjoys a good laugh. Why? The human body has a strong physical response to laughter - muscles in the face and body stretch, blood pressure and pulse rise and fall, and we breathe faster - which transports more oxygen through the body. Research shows laughter also strengthens the immune system, reduces food cravings and increases one's threshold for pain. While preschool kids laugh up to 400 times a day, adults laugh a dismal 17 times per day on average. Here are a few reasons to fight for a few extra laughs each day.

Balance Hormones

Laughter boosts the body's good hormones like endorphins and neuro-transmitters and reduces stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine, adrenaline and dopamine. Breath by breath, laughter builds the immune system by boosting the number of antibody-producing cells and enhancing the effectiveness of T-cells.

Improve Heart Health

Like exercise, a long bout of heavy laughter can burn calories and provide a physical and emotional release. A laughter workout tightens the abs, diaphragm and shoulders, and can even improve heart health. In a study from the University of Maryland School of Medicine, researchers compared the effects of watching funny versus stressful films. Movies that elicited laughter caused blood vessels to relax and increased blood flow, which can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Keep Perspective

Three women laughing hard. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark A positive outlook can do wonders for your health. If you can look at tough situations as a challenge rather than a threat and take the focus off your anger, guilt, stress and negativity, even if only for a few moments, you'll have the perspective you need to make the most of hard times.

Make Social Connections

Laughter is contagious. Not only can a good belly laugh improve your health, it can improve the health of those around you. Sharing a laugh builds strong social bonds and a mutual sense of community.

Researchers are becoming more and more confident that positive emotional states are beneficial to health. While scientists are busy trying to back these theories with concrete evidence, there's certainly no harm in filling your life with funny movies, comedy shows and good conversation with friends. Try the lighthearted approach to life's frustrations: Worry less, laugh more - no prescription necessary.

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