



Glynis Barber

LAUGH YOURSELF TO HEALTH

Our holistic columnist looks at the benefits of having a giggle

Is there anything more enjoyable than having a really good laugh? I myself love it and have always been drawn to funny people. I sometimes think of laughter as my favourite hobby.

I've noticed that when I'm tired or stressed, I get very giggly and the most random little things will strike me as being absolutely hilarious, often to the bemusement of others. And if something tickles my funny bone, I've been known to giggle about it for days afterwards, sometimes even cracking up in the middle of the night.

Years ago I was in a lift in New York and I got the giggles about what my sister was wearing and by the time we reached the top, the entire lift was in fits of laughter. It really is one of my all time favourite memories.

And it turns out I was doing them all a big favour because laughing is very good for us. I mean it's got to be there for a purpose, hasn't it? Because if you think about it, laughing is really quite strange. Dare I say funny even?

Dr Frank Lipman has observed that in his 20 years of practising, the patients of his that have a sense of

humour and laugh a lot tend to heal better and faster than those who don't. He recommends full on joyous laughter for health and wellness.

And it would seem there is good reason that I get giggly when stressed because laughter actually lowers the levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) and causes chemical changes in the brain that help buffer our bodies against the cumulative effects of anxiety. On top of this it stimulates the release of endorphins, which explains the high we get after a good laugh.

It also boosts the immune system and increases T cell activity which is vital in the fight against viruses and tumours. It regulates blood pressure, increases blood oxygenation, decreases pain and even enhances memory. Well you're not likely to forget something if it's really funny, are you?

It also turns out to be a good workout involving many muscle groups. Obviously the diaphragm and abdominal muscles work hard when laughing, but also the back and legs get involved. And how many times have you heard yourself say that your face hurts from so much smiling and laughing? Moving your facial muscles this way is great for firming and toning and the added blood flow will do all kinds of wonderful things for your skin.

Laughter is a powerful tool in diffusing anger and conflict too. A shared laugh can build many bridges and put problems in perspective. It's an important part of our social interactions and can help us make friends and connect with others.

Laughter may even help us live longer. A study in Norway found that people with a strong sense of humour outlived people who didn't laugh as much. Humour has been found to be a particularly powerful tool for those battling cancer. So relax, put your feet up and put those funny movies on.

TRY IT TODAY

1. Why not use laughing as a way to burn extra calories? Just 10 to 15 minutes of chuckling throughout the day is like a mini workout!

2. Remember that laughter is the perfect antidote to anxiety, anger and sadness so use it as a tool to boost your mood.

3. Smile more. Smiling is the beginning of laughter and instantly makes you feel happier. Smile at anything even mildly pleasing and notice the effect this has on people around you.

4. Negative thoughts can get in the way of humour. Count your blessings every day and feel the gratitude. This will help open the door to laughter.

5. Seek out funny, playful people. Laughter is contagious as is their playful point of view.

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