

Laughter is the Best Medicine – 8 Health Benefits of Humor

A research-based article written for a lifestyle and wellness website.



Image Caption

Laughter has long been lauded as the best medicine. A giggle a day will surely keep the doctor away. Most people feel better after a good laugh, but then again many people will only laugh when they feel better. So are there benefits, or is it just a side effect?

Sure, from a psychological perspective laughter improves your mood and is less harmful than sorrow or anger. But are there actually any medically-founded benefits? Can doctors really prescribe a steady diet of comedies to cure some illness?

Unfortunately, the definitive research analysis of laughter has not happened yet. People know that laughter certainly is not a bad thing, but there has not been enough scientific evidence to prove anything more. Despite this, researches and scientists have done studies on the effects of laughter, and their findings will bring a smile to your face.

Here are eight ways that giggles, chuckles, and guffaws are believed to make you healthier.

- 1. Relieves stress.** It has been shown that laughter reduces the levels of stress hormones (like epinephrine, cortisol, and dopamine) in your body. On the other hand it can also increase the presence of health-enhancing chemicals like endorphins. Endorphins help alleviate physical pain and they also help to improve your mood. Mental stress can be the gateway for other health problems down the road, so do your best to ease tension and lighten your load with a hearty laugh here and there.
- 2. Increases blood flow.** Research shows that laughter helps your blood vessels function better, which in turn means a healthier heart and brain. Laughter increases blood flow by causing the endothelium (inner lining of blood vessels) to relax and expand. Interestingly, a study was done at the University of Maryland on a group of people, half of which watched a comedy and the other half watched a movie that caused mental stress. Artery flow increased by 22% in the participants who watched the comedy. The opposite effect happened to the other group, where the blood flow slowed down by 35%. Once again, this shows laughter not just helping but preventing harm.
- 3. Boosts immune response.** Going back to stress, studies show that increased anxiety is associated with a decreased immune system response. A person’s natural response to humor may also raise the level of immune cells and the level of infection-fighting antibodies. All of this works to make your body more resistant to diseases.
- 4. It’s a workout.** Laughter is not just an emotional response to external stimuli; it is also a physical act. A hearty laugh exercises your diaphragm muscles, your abs, and even your shoulders. It is also a good workout for that important muscle known as the heart. One scientist named William Fry said that just one minute of good laughter put his heart rate at the same level as ten minutes on the rowing machine. Another scientist said that ten minutes of laughter burned off about 50 calories. Laughter shouldn’t replace your normal workout, but it’s a nice addition.
- 5. Lowers blood sugar levels.** Not only does laughter increase blood flow and improve your immune system, it also lowers the blood sugar levels in your body. This increase in glucose tolerance is good for everyone, but especially beneficial to those with diabetes of all types. One research study had 19 diabetics eat a meal and then attend a very tedious lecture. The next day the patients came back and ate another meal, and this time they watched a comedy afterwards. The results showed that the blood sugar levels were lower after the comedy than they were after the lecture, proving that movies are way better than school (just kidding).
- 6. Engages the brain.** Here is another way that laughter can improve your school day. A psychologist from John Hopkins Medical School conducted an experiment after he noticed his pupils were falling asleep in class. He simply inserted jokes and humor into his presentations, and he instantly saw results. The students that stayed awake due to laughing scored significantly higher on exams than the students who didn’t laugh. That’s definitely something you should relay if you have a boring teacher or you just can’t comprehend the textbook you’re reading.
- 7. Improves outlook on life.** Another aspect of laughter is that it improves perspective. You might be going through tough times and adhering to a negative attitude. What’s the point of beating yourself up or dwelling on your sorrow? Instead of succumbing to this unhelpful mindset, let yourself laugh and look on the brighter side of life. Always be on the lookout for something in your life to laugh about. If you approach your day to day struggles with this attitude you will be less likely to stress out.
- 8. Improves your social side.** Laughter has a way of connecting people and creating emotional bonds. When you laugh you aren’t worrying about anything and you are more likely to be open and honest. Laughing also produces spontaneity and relives tensions. If the relationships around you become strained, laughter is a good way to break the ice and let go of defensiveness, leading to healing and problem solving.

Laughter connects people the same way a smile or a handshake does. It is a positive action every bit as contagious as a yawn. If you make a habit of laughing often, then those around you will also laugh and your quality of social interaction will increase.

There are many different ways to prompt laughter. Humor abounds in entertainment, such as movies, music, and television. You could also go to a funny play or a comedy club. The Internet is a good source for hilarious YouTube videos and the like.

Better yet, instead of all of this one-sided interaction, find ways to laugh with other people. Play with your kids, giggle with a loved one, and laugh with your friends. As mentioned before, laughter connects humans to one another, and we all need laughter in our daily lives.

There are many different ways that laughter is believed to improve one’s health, and this article lists just seven of the top ones. Take some time to come up with your own benefits of laughter, and see how it is affecting your outlook and emotions. You can also do your own experiments with laughter and see how it improves different areas of your life. Whatever you do, be sure to do it with joy and laughter. As Charlie Chaplin puts it, “A day without laughter is a day wasted.”

