

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC & Stuart deWitt, DC

Optimal Wellness: A Laughing Matter

Your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic focuses on teaching patients all-natural approaches to disease prevention and wellness. One such approach is incorporating a daily dose of laughter into your life. Not only is a good case of the giggles a lot of fun, scientific research shows that laughing has powerful healing properties. Research also suggests that a sound sense of humor may prevent health problems from occurring in the first place.



Investigation into laughter's healing properties has lead researchers and medical professionals to coin a new term: *laughter therapy*. While this moniker might sound silly, it is based on solid scientific evidence proving that laughter is indeed therapeutic.

Your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic promotes laughter as an all-natural pain reliever. Countless studies show that a good chuckle bolsters pain tolerance by escalating the release of endorphins: the body's "feel good" hormones. And, laughter simultaneously suppresses production of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenalin.

Best of all, its only side effect is a

sense of well-being and contentment. And that's important to your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic, who believes in addressing the underlying causes of disease and illness — not merely masking symptoms with potentially deadly drugs.

What Is So Funny?

Humor is difficult to define. "It is not strictly a physical response, and it has different meanings for different people." (*J Clin Oncol* 2005;23:645-8.)

According to Robert R. Provine, PhD, psychology professor and assistant director of neuroscience at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, most laughter doesn't occur from listening

to jokes; it comes from spending time with family members and friends.

People also tend to laugh more when in groups. Dr. Provine theorizes that's because laughter truly is contagious (*AORN J* 2004;80:241).

The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor defines therapeutic humor as "any intervention that promotes health and wellness by stimulation of a playful discovery, expression or appreciation of the absurdity or incongruity of life's situations."

Chuckles for a Strong Immune System

A strong immune system is crucial to optimal health. That's why your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic provides patients with a wealth of immune-boosting information regarding proper nutrition, exercise and the benefits of scheduling regular chiropractic appointments.

Laughter, it turns out, also has a positive effect on the immune system. It does this by increasing the production and release of natural killer (NK) cells. Research reveals that "low NK cell activity is linked to decreased disease resistance." (*Altern Ther Health Med* 2003;9:38-45.)



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Laughter also diminishes inflammation within the body, further preventing disease processes (*Fam Pract News* 2001;31:19).

Age Gracefully With Giggles

Laughter therapy may be particularly beneficial for older people, according to a study conducted in Korea.

A total of 109 people over the age of 65 participated in the trial. One group of 48 individuals took part in a laughter therapy group four times over one month. The remaining 61 volunteers served as a control group.

Before and after the trial month the participants were assessed for depression, cognitive function, quality of life and sleep quality. Findings showed that those in the laughter therapy group enjoyed significant improvement, compared with those in the control group.

The study's authors concluded that "Laughter therapy is considered to be useful, cost-effective and easily-accessible intervention that has positive effects on depression, insomnia, and sleep quality in the elderly." (*Geriatr Gerontol Int* 2011; Epub.)



Hoot Out Depression

Numerous studies show that laughter is extremely effective in easing depression and preventing it in the first place.

How might laughter alleviate depression? Researchers theorize that laughter stimulates brain regions involved

in preventing depression. In addition, it normalizes glands like the hypothalamus and pituitary gland, which produce hormones associated with mental well-being. Finally, laughter brings people closer together, fortifying relationships with family and friends, which wards off depression (*Riv Psychiatr* 2010;45:1-6).

Crack Up for Cardio Health

Research presented at the scientific session of the American College of Cardiology found that laughing for 15 minutes substantially bolsters the dilation of blood vessels, "which reduces the risk of a range of conditions, including migraine, high blood pressure and atherosclerosis [hardening of the arteries]." (*GP* 2005;NA:13.)

The report also included some impressive study results. Of 20 volunteers, 19 showed a 22 percent increase in circulation after watching 15 minutes of humorous film clips. The flipside? When these same volunteers were shown 15 minutes of stress-inducing clips, 14 suffered a 35 percent restriction in circulation.

Humor Helps What Hurts

One way a good guffaw promotes health is by keeping our minds off of our aches, pains and illnesses.

When a group of youngsters were asked to submerge one of their hands in 10-degree water for as long as possible — up to a maximum of three minutes — the average time was 87 bone-chilling seconds. When they were shown comedy videos during the procedure, however, "their heart rate, blood pressure and breathing all improved and they were able to put up with the pain for 125 seconds: 40 percent longer." (*Nurs Stand* 2004;19:18.)

The key, according to the authors of another study, is that "patients need to be active participants in the type of material selected." This just underscores that the definition of "funny" is purely subjective (*South Med J* 2003;96:25).

Smile Away Stress

Zap stress with laughter, say researchers.

Humor helps us make sense of, understand and cope with reality. It also "serves as nature's biofeedback, stress-control system." (*Nurs Adm Q* 1993;18:80-9.)

In addition to quelling levels of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenalin, researchers in Australia note that laughter also enhances creativity and helps us to forget what was bothering us in the first place (*Aust Fam Physician* 2001;30:25-8).

Chiropractic Prevents The Ravages of Stress on the Body

Stress takes three major forms: chemical, emotional and physical. Like most chiropractic offices, we teach patients how to prevent harmful stress and its effects on the body.

Unchecked, stress wreaks havoc on the body. For instance, stress is linked with dysfunctional areas in the spine called **vertebral subluxations**. This condition is the enemy to wellness. It is associated with a plethora of disorders, ranging from ear infections to back pain to infertility.

Doctors of chiropractic correct vertebral subluxations with gentle and effective maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**. In addition, chiropractors teach patients how to prevent the various forms of stress that may foster spinal problems. Laughter is just one of many prevention-oriented approaches embraced by the chiropractic lifestyle.

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