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Laughter

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Laughter is a form
of internal jogging.

LAUGHTER

May Lengthen Your Life

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

A hearty laugh may be good for your health and protect you against heart disease. A good burst of laughter can increase heart rate, improve blood circulation, increase respiration and better oxygenate your system, and reduce the level of stress hormones. Laughter is a form of internal jogging, providing benefits to the heart similar to that obtained from an exercise routine.

But there are also psychological benefits of laughter. A good laugh can help a person improve their outlook on life, and may even lift a person out of depression. Laughter is a useful factor for combating the negative effects of stress and illness, and enables a person to relax. Humor helps to minimize one's worries and fears, and enables an individual to confront problems with greater creativity and flexibility, and relieves a tense situation.

Humor is the spice of life. It adds life and color to a conversation, and helps a person connect with the listener and keep the listener engaged. Since it can be contagious, laughter has a way of creating a bond between people in a room.

Health professionals know the value of laughter to reduce pain, foster recovery, and brighten the outlook on life. Hospital patients who received humor therapy by watching comedies, *Candid Camera* reruns, and reading jokes are more relaxed and responsive, sleep better, and make fewer demands on the hospital staff. Lee Birk found that people who regularly watch comedy videos have a marked decrease in cortisol (the stress hormone), lower blood pressure levels, fewer heart attacks over time, and a significant increase in the activity of disease-fighting immune cells.

Humor therapy can improve the quality of life for patients with chronic problems. Norman Cousins claimed

ten minutes of solid belly laughter relieved his inflammatory condition and gave him two hours of pain-free sleep. Kathleen Dillon found those who used humor as a way to cope with difficult life situations had the highest immunoglobulin A (IgA) levels. She concluded that a consistently cheerful attitude bolstered the body's disease-fighting forces. There is also real health-promoting value in remembering pleasant and humorous events from the past.

After interviewing more than 50 centenarians recently, Dan Buettner reported there was not a grump among the whole bunch. Those who lived a very long life were happy people with a good sense of humor. Christians should be joyful (Ps. 68:3), and recognize there are appropriate times for laughter (Eccl. 3:4). Laughter is just one way to experience cheerfulness. Solomon, years ago, wrote that cheerfulness can do a lot of good like a medicine (Prov. 17:22).

Winston Craig is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.

Laughter helps reduce pain
and promotes recovery
from illness.

