

LAUGHTER IS GOOD MEDICINE

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, NCC, CEAP, SAP

Have you heard that it takes more muscles to frown than it does to smile? Research indicates that there is no real agreement on exactly how many muscles it takes to frown - or to smile. But, it does show smiling, giggling, laughing, and expressing joy are important to both our physical and mental health. Laughter is good medicine!

Laughter makes us feel good physically. It boosts the immune system and releases pleasure-inducing chemicals and endorphins in our brains. Endorphins occur naturally in our bodies and cause us to feel better and cope with pain more effectively. A good laugh helps lower our blood pressure, causes our blood vessels to function more efficiently, reduces blood sugar, and eases pain. It also burns calories and gives muscles of our face, chest, shoulder, stomach, and diaphragm a good workout!! What's not to love about the physical effects of laughter?

And emotionally – people who laugh a lot have more positive moods, better relationships, and less anxiety and stress. Facial expressions are said to be contagious. When you smile at someone, you are very apt to receive a smile in return. “Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.” (Victor Borge) The ever-wise Mother Teresa tells us, “Every time you smile at someone it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.”

Just how happy are you? Do you have a positive attitude, or are you more pessimistic? When was the last time you had a really good, side-splitting, hearty laugh? Do you smile automatically when you meet someone? What message are you sending with your facial expression?

Why not try to increase your awareness, and your happiness? Try smiling more. Count your blessings. Focus on humor. Laugh at yourself – even your embarrassing moments. Make the best of every situation. Surround yourself with reminders to “lighten up.” And, allow your inner child to emerge.

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