Health Benefits of Laughter

Research has shown health benefits of laughter ranging from strengthening the immune system to reducing food cravings to increasing one's threshold for pain. There's even an emerging therapeutic field known as humour therapy to help people heal more quickly, among other things. Humour also has several important stress relieving benefits.

Hormones: Laughter reduces the level of stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine (adrenaline), dopamine and growth hormone. It also increases the level of health-enhancing hormones like endorphins, and neurotransmitters. Laughter increases the number of antibody-producing cells and enhances the effectiveness of T cells. All this means a stronger immune system, as well as fewer physical effects of stress.

Physical Release: Have you ever felt like you "have to laugh or I'll cry"? Have you experienced the cleansed feeling after a good laugh? Laughter provides a physical and emotional release.

Internal Workout: A good belly laugh exercises the diaphragm, contracts the abs and even works out the shoulders, leaving muscles more relaxed afterward. It even provides a good workout for the heart.

Distraction: Laughter brings the focus away from anger, guilt, stress and negative emotions in a more beneficial way than other mere distractions.

Perspective: Studies show that our response to stressful events can be altered by whether we view something as a 'threat' or a 'challenge'. Humour can give us a more lighthearted perspective and help us view events as 'challenges', thereby making them less threatening and more positive.

Social Benefits of Laughter: Laughter connects us with others. Also, laughter is contagious, so if you bring more laughter into your life, you can most likely help others around you to laugh more, and realise these benefits as well. By elevating the mood of those around you, you can reduce their stress levels, and perhaps improve the quality of social interaction you experience with them, reducing your stress level even more!

How To Use Laughter:
Laughter is one of my all-time favorite stress management strategies because it's free, convenient, and beneficial in so many ways. You can get more laughter in your life with the following strategies:

T.V. and Movies: There's no shortage of laughter opportunities from the entertainment, both at the theatre and in the aisles of the dvd stores, as well as at home with T.V. comedies. While wasting your time watching something marginally funny may actually frustrate you, watching truly hilarious movies and shows is an easy way to get laughter into your life whenever you need it.

Laugh With Friends: Going to a funny movie or comedian with friends is a great way to get more laughter in your life. The contagious effects of laughter may mean you'll laugh more than you otherwise would have during the show, plus you'll have jokes to reference at later times. Having friends over for a party or game night is also a great setup for laughter and other good feelings.

Find Humour In Your Life: Instead of complaining about life's frustrations, try to laugh about them. If something is so frustrating or depressing it's ridiculous, realize that you could 'look back on it and laugh.' Think of how it will sound as a story you could tell to your friends, and then see if you can laugh about it now. With this attitude, you may also find yourself being more lighthearted and silly, giving yourself and those around you more to laugh about. Approach life in a more mirthful way and you'll find you're less stressed about negative events, and you'll achieve the health benefits of laughter.

'Fake It Until You Make It': Just as studies show the positive effects of smiling occur whether the smile is fake or real, faked laughter also provides the benefits mentioned above. So smile more, and fake laughter; you'll still achieve positive effects, and the fake merriment may lead to real smiles and laughter.

Moodwatchers deliberately uses humour. All presentations include funny stories by design. Humour makes us feel better. Laughter is often a breakthrough in self-discovery!

Sources: Bennett MP, Lengacher C. Humour and Laughter May Influence Health: III. Laughter and Health Outcomes. Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, March 2008.

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