

The Six Practices of Good-Hearted Living They put more laughter and lightness into your life

"One for every day of the week; they'll give your attitude a tweak"

Here are six simple principles proven to create the foundation for more laughter and less stress in everyday life. They are keyed to the days of the week so they are easier to remember. Get used to doing them and watch your life feel better.

Monday is for compliments. Look for the good in others and in yourself. Pay compliments, publicly if appropriate. A compliment means something is going right—acknowledge it!
Antidote for: judgmentalness, being overly critical, overactive ego, pessimism.

Tuesday is for flexibility. Try something new, be it big or small. Try saying "Yes" when you would usually say "no". Be open to accepting the unexpected. Eat something different for lunch.
Antidote for: hardening of the attitudes, habits turning into ruts, loss of creativity, creeping rigidity.

Wednesday is for gratitude. Thank God it's Wednesday! Cultivate gratitude for things great and small all day. Be grateful you have shoes on your feet. Is that big thing or a little thing? Regardless, be grateful for it. Remember, "Gratitude preceeds joy".
Antidote for: negativity, focusing on lack, consumerism, greed.

Thursday is for kindness. Do small things (and occasionally large ones) that make someone else's life easier. A prime day for random acts of kindness. Extra points for kindness to people that don't seem to deserve it—the crabby, the rude, the unappealing. (Don't they need it the most?)
Antidote for: stinginess, mean-spiritedness, generally being a sourpuss.

Friday is for forgiveness. Let go of resentments, grudges, irritation. Liberate yourself: forgive! Get silly with it. Try radical forgiveness: forgive your shoelace for breaking, the lightbulb for burning out. Who knows, maybe you'll get to the point of being able to forgive the jerk behind you for blowing his horn the instant the traffic light turns green.
Antidote for: anger, resentment
"Holding a grudge is like swallowing poison and expecting the other person to die."

Weekends are for Chocolate. Do things that make life sweet for you. Chocolate is a metaphor for what makes life worth living for you—whatever restores, refreshes, and revitalizes you. Don't make the weekend two more days of work. Feed your zest for life, soak up leisure-time pleasures. Do the responsible thing and play: a recent study found NASA technicians were 40% more efficient when they came back from vacation!
Antidote for: Caregiver burn-out, loss of creativity, insufficient episodes of joyfulness. "Then I commanded mirth because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry." – Ecclesiastes 8:15

Taken together, these 6 simple practices will gently permeate your outlook on life. A space can be created for the simple pleasure of frequent laughter. You can laugh more easily and more often. You'll like the effect it has on your connections with people!

Some laughter resources:

World Laughter Tour—information, resources, training. www.WorldLaughterTour.com
Laughter Yoga – great website, look for the Happiness Exercises. www.laughangeles.com
Association for Applied Therapeutic Laughter—the name says it all. www.aath.org
Laughter Yoga on the Telephone—Free everyday! Info at www.LaughterYogaOnThePhone.com
Laughter Club in Albuquerque—Free! Contact Rebecca Wood at well@welovelaughter.com

Attitude is Everything

The Dog's Diary

8:00 am - Dog food! My favorite thing!
9:30am - A car ride! My favorite thing!
9:40am - A walk in the park! My favorite thing!
10:30am - Got rubbed and petted! My favorite thing!
12:00pm - Milk bones! My favorite thing!
1:00pm - Played in the yard! My favorite thing!
3:00pm - Wagged my tail! My favorite thing!
5:00pm - Dinner! My favorite thing!
7:00pm - Got to play ball! My favorite thing!
8:00pm - Wow! Watched TV with people! My favorite thing!
11:00pm - Sleeping on the bed! My favorite thing!

The Cat's Diary

Day 983 of my captivity.

My captors continue to taunt me with bizarre little dangling objects.

They dine lavishly on fresh meat, while the other inmates and I are fed hash or some sort of dry nuggets. Although I make my contempt for the rations perfectly clear, nevertheless I must eat something in order to keep up my strength.

The only thing that keeps me going is my dream of escape. In an attempt to disgust them, I once again vomited on the carpet.

Today I decapitated a mouse and dropped its headless body at their feet. I had hoped this would strike fear into their hearts, since it clearly demonstrates my capabilities. However, they merely made condescending comments about what a "good little hunter" I am. Bastards!

There was some sort of assembly of their accomplices tonight. I was placed in solitary confinement for the duration of the event. However, I could hear the noises and smell the food. I overheard that my confinement was due to the power of "allergies". I must learn what this means, and how to use it to my advantage.

Today I was almost successful in an attempt to assassinate one of my tormentors by weaving around his feet as he was walking. I must try this again tomorrow, but at the top of the stairs. I am convinced that the other prisoners here are flunkies and snitches. The dog receives special privileges. He is regularly released, and seems to be more than willing to return. He is obviously retarded.

The bird must be an informant. I observe him communicate with the guards regularly. I am certain that he reports my every move. My captors have arranged protective custody for him in an elevated cell, so he is safe. For now.....

How Do You Want to Look at Life?



Study Proves Benefits of Laughter in the Workplace

“Purposeful laughter is a realistic, sustainable, and generalizable intervention that enhances employees’ morale, resilience, and personal efficacy beliefs.....can appeal to a diverse range of employees, can be effective with minimal investment of time.....positive effects on self-beliefs that have been shown to correlate with positive workplace behaviors....”

-----from study published in *Journal of Primary Prevention*

According to a recent study in the prestigious medical publication “The Journal of Primary Prevention”, many organizational and personal benefits resulted from a brief laughter program carried out in a mid-size corporation.

Employees demonstrated a significant increase in several different aspects of self-efficacy, including self-regulation, optimism, positive emotions, and social identification. These gains were maintained at follow-up.

Participants were found to have significant improvements in 3 crucial competencies:

- **Self-Competencies:** Participants believed themselves to be more capable of doing their jobs and handling their responsibilities.
- **Relational Competencies:** Participants believed their relationships with co-workers and others were productive and healthy.
- **Role Competencies:** Participants had a more favorable view about the rules and expectations of work and daily life and their ability to function well within them.

The study found significant increases in:

- **Optimism:** Ability to be positive and hopeful about the future in the face of stress, setbacks, or disappointments.
- **Motivation:** Ability to begin and sustain behaviors to accomplish goals.
- **Adaptability:** Ability to solve problems by being flexible, creative, and translating ideas into action.
- **Assertiveness:** Ability to express thoughts and feelings in a nondestructive manner.
- **Self-Regulation:** Ability to control one’s thoughts and feelings in times of stress and remain calm under pressure.
- **Self-Actualization:** Ability to live up to potential through the pursuit of challenging goals, setting high personal standards, pursuing tasks outside one’s comfort zone.
- **Positive Emotions:** Ability to experience, sustain, and express positive emotions.
- **Empathy:** Ability to be aware of, sensitive to, and appreciate others’ thoughts and feelings and to respond in an understanding manner
- **Social Identification:** Ability to feel connected with others, to give and receive social support.

From Beckman, H., Regier, N., & Young, J. (2007), Effect of workplace laughter groups on personal efficacy beliefs, *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 28, 167-182. An electronic copy of the complete article is available free on request from James Masica.

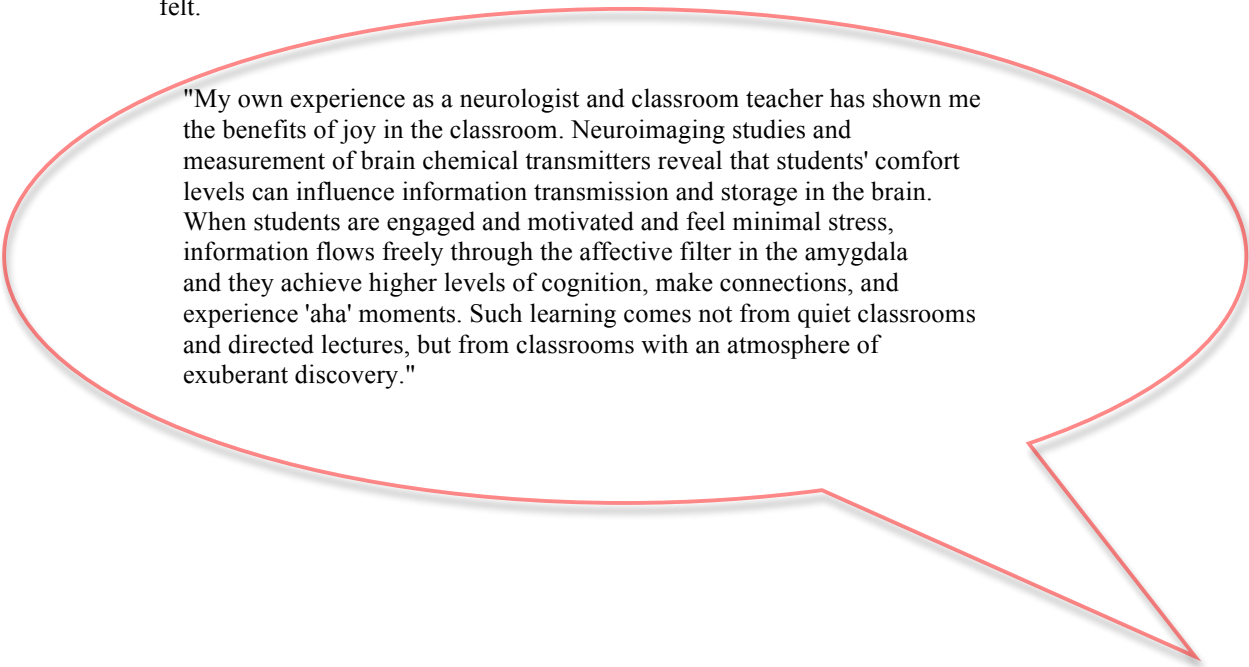


EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

According to Judy Ellis, writing in Education Leadership ("The Neuroscience of Joyful Education," Summer 2007), "Brain research tells us that when the fun stops, learning often stops too." In the introduction to her article she summarize her views....

"Most children can't wait to start kindergarten and approach the beginning of school with awe and anticipation. Kindergartners and 1st graders often talk passionately about what they learn and do in school. Unfortunately, the current emphasis on standardized testing and rote learning encroaches upon many students' joy. In their zeal to raise test scores, too many policymakers wrongly assume that students who are laughing, interacting in groups, or being creative with art, music, or dance are not doing real academic work. The result is that some teachers feel pressure to preside over more sedate classrooms with students on the same page in the same book, sitting in straight rows, facing straight ahead.

"The truth is that when we scrub joy and comfort from the classroom, we distance our students from effective information processing and long-term memory storage. Instead of taking pleasure from learning, students become bored, anxious, and anything but engaged. They ultimately learn to feel bad about school and lose the joy they once felt.



"My own experience as a neurologist and classroom teacher has shown me the benefits of joy in the classroom. Neuroimaging studies and measurement of brain chemical transmitters reveal that students' comfort levels can influence information transmission and storage in the brain. When students are engaged and motivated and feel minimal stress, information flows freely through the affective filter in the amygdala and they achieve higher levels of cognition, make connections, and experience 'aha' moments. Such learning comes not from quiet classrooms and directed lectures, but from classrooms with an atmosphere of exuberant discovery."

Laughter creates a sense of safety and relaxation, by activating the amygdala and related brain centers. This sense of wellbeing enables the neocortex to take in new information, and make connections between seemingly unrelated facts—which is creative thinking. Laughter is an evidence-based intervention for promoting learning.



Anticipating A Laugh Reduces Our Stress Hormones, Study Shows

ScienceDaily (Apr. 10, 2008)

In 2006 researchers investigating the interaction between the brain, behavior, and the immune system found that simply anticipating a mirthful laughter experience boosted health-protecting hormones. Now, two years later, the same researchers have found that the anticipation of a positive humorous laughter experience also reduces potentially detrimental stress hormones. According to Dr. Lee Berk, the study team's lead researcher of Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA, "Our findings lead us to believe that by seeking out positive experiences that make us laugh we can do a lot with our physiology to stay well."

In their earlier work the researchers found that the anticipation of "mirthful laughter" had surprising and significant effects. Two hormones – beta-endorphins (the family of chemicals that alleviates depression) and human growth hormone (HGH; which helps with immunity) – increased by 27 and 87 percent respectively when volunteers anticipated watching a humorous video. There was no such increase among the control group who did not anticipate watching the humor film.

Using a similar protocol, the current research found that the same anticipation of laughter also reduced the levels of three stress hormones. Cortisol (termed "the stress hormone"), epinephrine (also known as adrenaline) and dopac, a dopamine catabolite (brain chemical which helps produce epinephrine), were reduced 39, 70 and 38 percent, respectively (statistically significant compared to the control group).

Chronically released high stress hormone levels can weaken the immune system.

The research is entitled Cortisol and Catecholamine Stress Hormone Decrease Is Associated with the Behavior of Perceptual Anticipation of Mirthful Laughter. It was conducted by Lee Berk with Stanley A. Tan, both of the Oak Crest Health Research Institute, Loma Linda, CA; and Dottie Berk, Loma Linda University Health Care, Loma Linda. Lee Berk is presenting the team's findings at the 121st Annual Meeting of the American Physiological Society, part of the Experimental Biology 2008 scientific conference.

Laughter—A Deeper Look

James Masica, MA, LPCC

What would you guess about the physical and mental health of somebody who never laughed?

Human beings are "hard wired" to laugh from birth. It's something nature has built into every one of us. Even little babies laugh; obviously it's not in response to something "funny". Laughing is a physical act that makes us feel good. We really don't need a reason to laugh beyond the simple joy of being alive. We've confused laughter with humor. Laughter is physical; humor is mental. Humor can bring on laughter, but laughter doesn't need humor.

Children laugh 150-200 times a day; adults laugh just 15-20 times a day. That's a lot of missing laughter! It's surprisingly easy to re-discover our laughter capacity—it actually hasn't gone away. It's been covered over with our ideas about adulthood and responsibility. Growing up, we don't get many messages about the importance of retaining our capacity to laugh. We might have even been discouraged from laughter. But now medical science and organizational science is proving what we sense intuitively—laughter is an ingredient in optimum functioning. A lack of laughter is a warning sign, for organizations, individuals, and relationships.

The physical act of laughter causes a whole spectrum of changes in the body and therefore the mind. A category of brain chemical, catecholamines, is increased, which boosts mental functions across the board. Alertness, memory, generosity and cooperation are all increased. The feel-good brain hormones called endorphins flood into the body. These are the brain's natural pain-killers, part of the reason why we feel so good after laughter.

At the same time, the body's immune system gets stronger with laughter, as the T-cell count and other immune functions work better. One reason they work better is that laughter decreases stress hormones, such as cortisol, which are associated with the flight-or-fight response. Stressful modern lifestyles tend to feed this response, which is sometimes compared to driving with your feet on the accelerator and brakes at the same time!

A University of Maryland School of Medicine study found people with serious heart disease laughed significantly less in everyday situations. Another found 40% less risk of a second heart attack for people who participated in a laughter study. There are many, many more instances of health benefits associated with laughter.

But the benefits are not only for the individual; groups, organizations and relationships also are all improved by laughter. Since it improves a person's over-all mood, we become more cooperative, generous, and interested in those around us. Laughter is seldom a solitary activity—it almost always is shared with others. It dissolves tensions and makes us more inclined to see others in a positive light. The companies on Forbes Magazine's "100 Best Places to Work" list have only one thing in common—they are all described as "fun places to work". And the number one characteristic people look for in a partner? "They make me laugh".

James Masica has been active in the human development field for 26 years. He likes to work at the intersection of individual accomplishment and group excellence. He began working in the laughter field in 2006, drawn by the transformative effect of the belly laugh. He speaks, presents and consults to businesses and organizations of all sizes about using laughter for team building, leadership development, customer service, stress management and creativity. He has a Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology. In addition to his organizational development work, he is a licensed therapist specializing in peak performance and trauma recovery.

AARP Bulletin, August 8, 2008

Laughter Yoga to Improve Health? It's No Joke

By Sally Abrahams

When she was first introduced to laughter yoga at her New York City senior center, Millie Mund thought it was “weird.” And who wouldn't? Stretching her hands skyward, taking deep breaths, clapping her hands and chanting “ho ho, ha ha ha” while staring directly at other group members until everyone is laughing uncontrollably, took getting used to.

“At the beginning, I felt silly, but then I forgot about my pain,” says Mund, 85, who has osteoporosis, arthritis, high blood pressure and circulatory problems. “You look around and see everybody laughing and smiling. It's a lot of fun.”

Developed in 1995 by Madan Kataria, M.D., a family practitioner from India, laughter yoga “is based on the scientific concept that your body can't tell the difference between simulated and spontaneous laughter,” Kataria says. “You get the same health benefits. The yoga breathing, in combination with laughter exercises, brings more oxygen to the body and makes you feel energetic and stay healthy.”

Laughter yoga is only one tool in the growing field of laughter therapy. Today, humor is used to treat chronic pain associated with cancer, arthritis or other illnesses, as well as depression, anxiety and stress disorders. Psychiatrists, family therapists, social workers and an increasing number of “certified laughter therapists” or “laughter leaders” prescribe jokes, reading funny books, watching comic movies—or anything that evokes gut-splitting squeals for the purpose of feeling better. Clips from classic TV sitcoms like *I Love Lucy*, *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, *Seinfeld*, *All in the Family* or *The Bob Newhart Show* work well. Standup comedy shticks from Lily Tomlin, CDs such as “The 2000 Year Old Man” with Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks, or movies like *Blazing Saddles* or *There's Something About Mary* can be just the right medicine.

Many laughter therapists teach workshops at government offices, corporations, nursing homes and police departments. Even some Roman Catholic nuns find laughter therapy useful in ministering to others. Sister Angelica Menta, a Houston nun and a licensed family therapist, has traveled throughout Texas for 20 years conducting laughter workshops for cancer patients and at senior centers and workplaces. Known as “the Stand-Up Nun,” Sister Menta wears silly hats, tells jokes and encourages her people to find laughter in everyday life, using humor as a path to spirituality.

The medical community has recognized the healing power of humor since the 14th century, when the French surgeon Henri de Mondeville suggested that doctors should look after each patient's joy and happiness “by having someone tell him jokes.” But the modern father of laughter therapy is thought to be Norman Cousins, for 30 years the editor of the *Saturday Review*. Cousins recounted his own self-treatment with humor in an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1976, after he'd been diagnosed with a very painful, life-threatening form of arthritis called ankylosing spondylitis. Doctors gave him little chance of recovery.

When traditional medicine failed to relieve his pain, Cousins left the hospital, checked into a hotel, took megadoses of vitamin C and watched Marx Brothers films and TV sitcoms, finding that 10 minutes of “belly laughter” allowed him two hours of pain-free sleep. He eventually recovered and wrote a series of best-selling books on humor and healing. Before he died in 1990

at age 75 from heart failure, Cousins was made an adjunct professor of medical humanities at the UCLA medical school.

What Cousins discovered on his own, researchers have recently been trying to prove through scientific study: that laughter can relieve pain, reduce depression, promote relaxation, boost the immune system, improve blood flow and breathing, lower blood pressure and glucose levels, and even slow the growth of cancer cells. "Studies indicate that participating in laughter therapy is beneficial in terms of disease control," says William Fry, M.D., professor emeritus at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

Just how powerful a medicine laughter may be was demonstrated by Michael Miller, M.D., director of preventive cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center. In 2006, in the journal *Heart*, Miller reported on a group of 20 healthy volunteers, none suffering from heart disease or high blood pressure, randomly assigned to watch a 15- to 30-minute segment of either a comedy film, to induce laughter, or an action-packed drama, to cause mental stress.

Miller measured the flow of blood in his subjects' brachial arteries in the upper arm before and after the movies. Nineteen of the 20 people who watched the comedy experienced increased blood flow by a mean of 15 percent, suggesting that laughter relaxes the arteries and may ease strain on the heart. On the other hand, 14 of the 20 volunteers who watched the drama found that blood flow in their arteries was reduced by a mean of 47 percent, an amount Miller compares to a fit of anger, which may raise blood pressure, constrict arteries and stress the heart.

"We think this is the real deal," says Miller. "There's no question in my mind that there is some physiological benefit from laughter. Now, we need to translate what those changes in our blood vessels mean clinically."

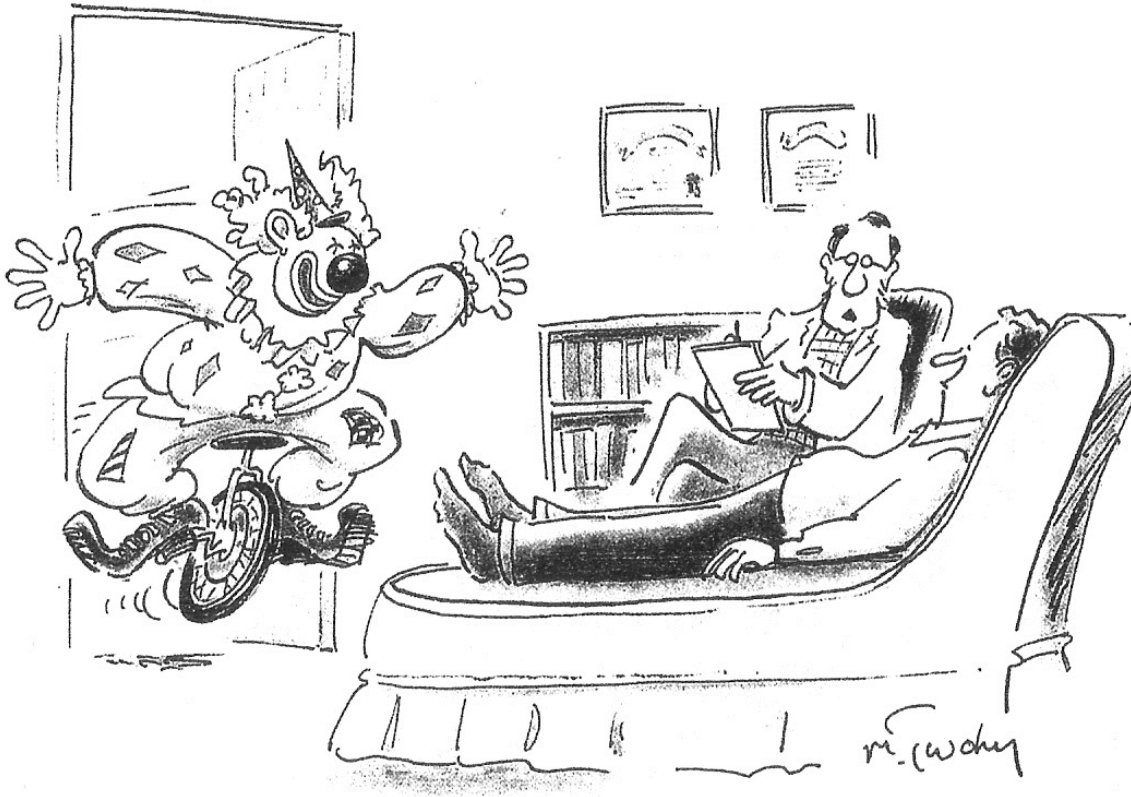
California researcher Lee Berk, an associate professor at Loma Linda University School of Public Health, is documenting laughter's ability to boost immune cell activity and improve mood. "Just the anticipation of laughter can change your biology, lower stress hormones and increase endorphins that affect mood states and vigor," says Berk.

In a 2006 study, Berk and his colleagues found that body chemicals called beta-endorphins, nature's pain relievers and antidepressants, increased by 27 percent when volunteers simply anticipated watching a humorous video. Human growth hormone, which boost immunity to disease, also rose in the volunteers—by 87 percent. No increase in these hormones occurred in the control group, which wasn't told they would see the video.

This year, the same researchers looked at the impact of anticipating laughter on three major stress hormones. High levels of stress hormones can have a detrimental impact on the immune and cardiovascular systems. All three stress hormones were reduced when subjects anticipated seeing the funny video—and one dropped by 70%.

Although there's no scientific explanation, it's widely known that one of laughter's most therapeutic characteristics is that it is extremely contagious. Recently, Millie Mund decided to spread a little cheer by introducing laughter yoga to her son, daughter-in-law and adult grandchildren. "They thought I was crazy," she says, "but before I knew it, they were all doing 'ho ho, ha ha ha' and laughing!"

--reprinted from AARP Bulletin, August 8, 2008



“Your therapy will be a combination of drugs and clowns.”

“Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

--Abraham Lincoln