

THE IMPORTANCE OF LAUGHTER:

1. What laughter does for you physically

According to Stanford University School of Medicine Psychiatrist William Fry, 100 good laughs equal some of the physiological benefits of 10 minutes on a rowing machine. He says mirthful laughter has a positive impact on heart rate, respiration, the nervous and immune systems. "The brain is stimulated into greater alertness," he says, "which may enhance memory and sociability." It releases endorphins, which provide a temporary relief of pain. Muscles get a workout, and it even helps the cardiovascular system because of the increase in pulse, breathing and improved circulation. Lungs pump out carbon dioxide, and eyes cleanse themselves. It is relaxing, reduces stress and helps positive thinking. It can help you rest and help you function more effectively in other activities. There is a temporary increase in immunoglobulin A in your saliva, a substance that helps your system fight off colds, the flu and sinus problems.

2. How it helps when you're ill

A. The potential of humor in maintaining and re-establishing health is being researched. Laughter has reversed the immunosuppressive effects of anger, fear or loneliness which often go with hospitalization and recovery from illness. Results of experiments on volunteers watching funny videos have shown through blood sample analysis that individuals experiencing mirthful laughter have had positive results on the immune system. Laughter is not a cure-all but can help the healing process. It gives the chronically ill relief from frustration and disappointment.

B. Laughter can improve the relationship between patients and caregivers. Humor may help get information across. It is a way for caregivers to take care of themselves.

3. How it helps socially

It breaks the ice and builds trust. It identifies things we have in common and draws us together.

4. How it helps in the workplace

People in good spirits organize information better, they are more creative in word association, categorization and memory tasks. Humor improves decision-making and negotiating. Those who think fun belongs at work enjoy themselves most.

5. How it helps psychologically

It can help people get in touch with their feelings, gain perspective about problems and relieve a sense of helplessness. Laughter can relieve hostility and anger in an acceptable way. It can help us get in touch with our feelings or let them go. Allen Klein, author of "The Healing Power of Humor," says "Laughter helps you cope." It may be especially beneficial when people feel like crying, but he believes it is vital the rest of the time too, and we should not take ourselves too seriously.

6. Other benefits

It even burns calories, though no one knows exactly how many.

7. What healthful humor includes

The Webster-Merriam Dictionary definition is "a quality that appeals to the sense of the ludicrous or incongruous, comical or amusing entertainment."

The quality of the wit doesn't seem to matter, only the quantity. However, scorn, sarcasm, ridicule and contempt are not healthful.

8. How you can add more laughter to your life

Make it a regular part of your life to get the full effect. Watch comedy acts or videos, read funny books and newspaper cartoons. Laugh at other people's jokes. Remember the jokes, funny sayings or stories you come across and pass them on. Make funny faces in the mirror. Don't be afraid to be silly sometimes. Know your humor style, seek it out, surround yourself with it and laugh at yourself. Imagine how a favorite comic or humorist would look at the same trying situation you find yourself in. Keeping a file of your favorite jokes or cartoons can help remind you you're not alone. Allen Klein suggests, "Wear a red foam-rubber clown's nose, exaggerate setbacks to the point of absurdity, practice smiling when feeling tense--sometimes mood follows facial expression." There is a clear connection between intending to have fun and actually having fun.

9. Activity: Have members bring their favorite joke or tell about something that makes them laugh. Recommend favorite books or movies. Intersperse jokes throughout the program, or pass out funny hats to wear.

Sources: www.totheworld.com, www-dev.cartalk.com, baptisteast.com, siouxlan.com, thriveonline.com