



Try Laughter

Laughter Groups are a 'thing'. Yes, you read that right, a Laughter group. "What on earth is a laughter group?" I thought. Do you sit and tell jokes; perhaps analyse different types of laughter?

Well after investigating a little further, you laugh. Yep, that's it. You laugh, spontaneously, no doubt for the novice feeling a bit of a numpty! There isn't anything to make you laugh, you just laugh. I presume it will reach a point where a room full of people trying to laugh for no apparent reason will become quite funny and actually cause real laughter. Laughter, as it turns out, is one of the best medicines! Well I couldn't write about laughter and not use that could I?

What is laughter?

The scientific definition of laughter is a "successive, rhythmic, spasmodic expiration with open glottis and vibration of the vocal cords, often accompanied by baring of the teeth and facial expression".

Doesn't sound that enjoyable does it? Neither does it explain why laughter is so medically beneficial.

Why Laughter?

Numerous studies have shown that laughter boosts the immune system and triggers the release of pleasure inducing hormones in the brain.

The immune system, as you may well know, contains special cells that are responsible for defending the body against infection and it has been shown to increase during the act of laughing. As a result of laughing, the brain releases powerful endorphins which are natural morphine-like compounds that raise the pain threshold, produce sedation and induce euphoria. Quite simply, we feel better when we laugh because endorphins reduce physical and mental pain. While this may be a wonderful feeling, laughter has other benefits: it lowers blood pressure; improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow which can help protect against cardiovascular problems; it relaxes the whole body and relieves tension and stress.

Laughter and Stress Management

Laughter has been shown to be an effective stress management strategy. I'm sure, like me, you've experienced stressful meetings or situations and then someone starts to giggle and away we go, all joining in and a stressful situation is diffused.

The laughter has actually reduced the levels of epinephrine (adrenaline) and cortisol in the bloodstream. It does this by increasing the levels of health boosting hormones such

as endorphins, dopamine and oxytocin. A short period of laughter can literally boost your happiness in the moment with lingering feel good effects throughout the day.

Laughter and Pain

I mentioned above how laughter increases the number of anti-body producing cells which increases the body's ability to protect itself from disease; but how does laughter reduce pain or is it simply a distraction?

Laughter causes the brain to release powerful endorphins. These are natural morphine like compounds that raise the pain threshold, produce sedation and induce a natural high, a state of euphoria. So, when we laugh, these endorphins actually reduce our physical and mental pain.

Laughter and Exercise

Yep, exercise. Laughter burns calories! Laughter is sometimes referred to as 'inner jogging'.

Whoaaaaaaaaa hang on! Laughter is inner jogging? I have challenges with movement and managing pain levels, but I don't have any problems laughing! You won't find me jogging but if you now find me on my own laughing riotously, I'm simply doing my workout!

Think about it: a hearty laugh gives a good workout to a whole range of muscles in the face, the chest, shoulders, stomach and diaphragm.

How can we bring more laughter into our day?

Set the intention

Simply begin by thinking about the value of laughter to you and your life. It really gives a miraculous boost to the whole body. An intention is a conscious choice. Decide to laugh freely. Make a conscious choice to have fun and laugh.

Watch movies and TV shows that offer laughter

This isn't about picking something that is slightly funny, look for hilarious! I have a go to programme when I feel really low or stressed. No matter how miserable I felt, Frasier would always make me laugh out loud. There is one episode in particular that, no matter how many times I watch it, will reduce me to uncontrollable laughter. I have it recorded. (Series 5, Episode 21, Roz & The Schnoz!)

Find humour rather than negativity

Look for the humour in life's situations. Choose to laugh rather than complain. Don't be afraid of 'inappropriate' laughter, it can be the most riotous laughter of all (as long as it doesn't hurt anyone of course!). You know that laughter though, the type of laughter when every time you try to breathe you start laughing again.

Fake it until you make it

It works. Your brain doesn't know if the laughter is real or fake. The positive boost to your physical health and emotion happiness, in either case, is quite real! In other words, since the physical benefits are exactly the same, it gives you to the same results. So, do both: laugh or act as if you're laughing; begin by faking it if you need to and before you know it, the laughter will be real anyway.

Try out some Laughter Yoga or join a Laughter club!

I've tried Laughter Yoga and it is amazing. It's been around for quite some time - find out more about it [here](#). For Laughter clubs, try searching for them on Meetup.