

Laugh Yourself to a Healthier You!

Building your immune system with laughter

Despite the enormous benefits of laughter, we are often just too tired and stressed, rarely taking the time to indulge in a good belly laugh. Today, adults just do not laugh as we used to, regardless of how much our body, mind and soul benefit from it. The health benefits of laughter are even more far-ranging than we ever before believed, showing that laughter can help relieve pain, bring greater happiness, and even increase immunity. Laughter reduces the levels of stress hormones, like cortisol and epinephrine (adrenaline), while also increasing the level of health-enhancing hormones, like endorphins. It increases the number of antibody-producing cells we have working for our immune system and enhances the overall effectiveness of T cells. This means a stronger immune system and fewer manifestations of the physical effects of stress, like exhaustion, depression, insomnia, and weight gain.

The reward center is the same combination of brain areas (the ventral striatum) that are affected by virtually all pleasurable activity, including everything from hanging out with friends to getting a big bonus at work or even having sex. Dopamine is the main player in regulating the reward and pleasure centers of the brain, and laughter increases the release of dopamine. When dopamine levels are low, you lose your zest and enthusiasm for life and begin to experience great difficulty completing tasks since this neurotransmitter is critical for sheer motivation, interest, and the drive to achieve. Psychologists have found that being silly, losing yourself in the moment, and engaging in something pointless but pleasurable—like hanging out with friends and laughing—is essential to stress reduction, healthy relationships as well as maintaining a sense of well-being. When you engage in laughter, you experience a physical cleansing effect, as well as a sense of emotional release. Laughing is also great for the heart and increases oxygen levels throughout the body.

Laughter connects us with others. It is as simple as that. The same as smiling and kindness (or even yawning), most people find that laughter is irresistibly contagious. Therefore, if you laugh more, you can most likely help others around you to laugh more, reducing their stress levels as well as yours and perhaps improving the quality of your social interactions. Laughter brings our focus away from anger, negativity, hopelessness, bitterness,

and guilt like nothing else can. The act of laughing can bring you into the moment, which is something we desperately need since our rigid schedules tend to consume us, leaving us constantly thinking about the next thing needing to get done. Since our social norm is to juggle many acts of life at once, we are regularly running on high stress levels. Play and laughter are one of the few aspects of our lives that are not about the outcome, but the acts themselves, and that is so healing. So, feed into a pleasurable, gut-busting laugh all while boosting your immune system!

If you feel you need more balance in your life in order to laugh more, consider One Peak Medical as your personalized primary care, hormone-balancing and functional medicine clinic to get you there! www.onepeakmedical.com



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