

L.O.L.TO MANAGE STRESS...

"While it's true that you can't always change the situation you find yourself in, vou can always change your response to it..." **Betty Hart, Laugheceuticals**

Just as there are many sources of stress in our lives, there are many coping tools and strategies to manage its impact and keep us from tipping into overload. One powerful tool that may go overlooked is laughter. PEN hopes to encourage our youth, families and community to play intentionally and laugh vigorously on behalf of their own health and well-being. Below are some points supporting our Drive to Thrive: Laughter!

The physical response of laughter is very fast:

Something "funny" happens •••

Electric current runs through nervous system to

cerebral cortex •••

Left hemisphere takes analytic approach, creative Right hemisphere "gets it" •••

Visual center forms an image of the humorous idea •••

Emotional (limbic) system releases chemicals •••

Motor functioning makes us laugh, smile, or double over !!!

Laughter impacts different aspects of wellness:

 physical – boosts blood circulation, increases oxygenation, boosts immune system function stimulates organs, exercises our laughing muscles (imagine an internal body jog) and relaxes tense muscles,

• bio-chemical - increases endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, NK cells, growth hormone and interferon-gamma and **decreases** release of cortisol and adrenaline

 social-emotional – connects & bonds humans with one another, improves communication and empathy, releases unhealthy inhibitions

• mental - improves personal satisfaction, optimism and mood, breaks cycle of psychological negativity, activates emotional release

• cognitive - bolsters creativity, memory and recall

Laugh long, hard, and often!

This topic fits within the overarching PEN Speaks theme of Stress and Anxiety in Today's Youth and Families. Throughout the year we will explore other areas that support resilience in the face of this pervasive challenge.

Go to the PEN website penby.org for more information on upcoming events or connect with us at. http://www.parentengagementnetwork.org/contact-pen

Stress is experienced at every age, and at every age individuals try to cope with it. Susan Folkman, editor, Oxford Handbook on Stress, Health & Coping

GREAT Info Laughter & Stress

Laughter appears to cause all the reciprocal, or opposite, effects of stress... Think of laughter as the vin to stress's yang. Dr. Lee Berk, Associate Professor, Loma Linda

Laughter is this little trap door that allows you to escape from the toxic stress. Dr. Dacher Keltner, Prof. of Psychology, UC Berkeley

Gelotology from the Greek γέλως *gelos* "laughter" the study of laughter and its psychological & physiological effects on the body ... pioneered by William F. Fry of Stanford University.









6 Reasons Why Laughter Is the Best Medicine

By Tamara Lechner, The Chopra Center

Have you ever been in a tense or difficult situation when you suddenly burst into a fit of giggles?

Or feel a release or rejuvenated after watching a side-splittingly funny movie?

It turns out there's some scientific veracity behind the old adage "laughter is the best medicine."

"Laughter activates the body's natural relaxation response. It's like internal jogging, providing a good massage to all internal organs while also toning abdominal muscles," says Dr. Gulshan Sethi, head of cardiothoracic surgery at the Tucson Medical Center and faculty at the University of Arizona's Center for Integrative Medicine.

Perhaps that's why Deepak Chopra says the healthiest response to life is laughter. Studies have found that laughter can have healing properties; and it's contagious. Here are six reasons why you should start laughing today.

Laughter is Contagious

The discovery of mirror neurons—what causes you to smile when someone smiles at you—gives credence to the belief that laughter is contagious. When you're feeling down finding friends to laugh with can help your brain trigger its own laughter response and foster closeness, both of which contribute to your sense of well-being. Why do you think that sense of humor is such

an important trait when looking for a partner? We like the feeling of shared laughter and our body wants as much of this feeling as possible.

Laughter Reduces the Stress Response

When you laugh there's a contraction of muscles, which increases blood flow and oxygenation. This stimulates the heart and lungs and triggers the release of endorphins that help you to feel more relaxed both physically and emotionally.

Laughter Boosts Immunity

According to one study done at Indiana State School of nursing, mirthful laughter may increase natural killer cell levels, a type of white blood cell that attacks cancer cells.

Laughter Increases Resilience

Resilience is the ability to see failure as natural progression to success rather than as a negative outcome. People who are resilient are happier and more successful.

The ability to acknowledge mistakes without becoming angry or frustrated plays an important role in developing resilience. Laughing at mistakes allows us to recognize that making errors is a part of being human.

Laughter Combats Depression

Studies support laughter as a great way to get outside the downward spiral to depression. Being unhappy can become a pattern or mindset if we don't step outside of ourselves occasionally. By being a witness to our situation rather than allowing ourselves to feel the victim we can find the humor in it and see with fresh eyes. Even forced laughter releases a cocktail of hormones, neuropeptides, and dopamine that can start to improve your mood.

Laughter Relieves Pain

People who are laughing don't experience less pain, however they report being less bothered by the pain they do experience. It's not about changing pain levels. The amount of pain remains the same, but your perceived pain levels reduce and your belief that you can cope increases. Laughter by itself isn't the solution but it can help a person overcome discomfort.

Quick Hacks to Bring More Laughter Into Your Life

- Make humor a priority by reading a funny book, watching a comedy, or listening to your favorite comedian.
- · Share laughter with friends. Spend more time with people who have fun.
- · Practice laughter yoga, which Dr. Sethi practices and teaches on occasion.
- Remember that life is funny. The ability to laugh at yourself makes you attractive to others and can help relieve your own stress.
 Focus on finding the laughable moments in your day, and then tell a friend your funny story as a way to increase the power of laughter by sharing.
- Know what isn't funny. Laughing at the expense of others isn't funny. Be discerning about your humor by laughing with—not at—people.

Your ability to laugh can be cultivated with practice so start by prioritizing fun. Find occasion to be silly. Remember laughter, like smiling, is never depleted when you share it.

