Laugh Out Loud For Your Health

Do a sense of humor and laughter improve one's overall health and wellness?

Laughing yoga, the practice of laughing in groups as an exercise, became an international phenomenon in the mid 1990s. Today you can find these laughter classes all over from India to New York City as well as websites and videos on the internet. Some studies claim that sustained mirthful laughter confers multiple, positive benefits that impact people's mental and physical health. What is the truth to these claims of laughing out loud for your health?

Humor and laughter go hand in hand. Humor can be defined as a stimulus like a funny movie or a humorous thought that helps people laugh and feel happy. The act of laughing is the most common reaction to a humorous situation.

Some researchers hypothesize that humor and laughter positively impact people's health; this is called the humor-health hypothesis. Another commonly held belief is that laughter helps by reducing the negative effects of stress.

In psychological research, a sense of humor has been associated with higher levels of self-esteem and quality of life as well as lower levels of loneliness, depression and stress. In addition, patients dealing with serious illnesses such as cancer use humor as an valuable coping mechanism to get through difficult times.

Research on human physiology has shown that during periods of laughter people's heart rates, respiratory rates, deep breathing, and oxygen consumption all increase. Immediately following laughing bouts people experience a period of muscle relaxation along with decreased heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure. This relaxation period can last up to 45 minutes.

The effects of laughter on stress hormones and the immune system is not as clear. A few small studies have demonstrated that laughter does decrease stress hormones, however, other studies document conflicting results. To date, there is not a clear understanding as to the mechanism of the effects of laughter on stress hormones and the immune system.

According to those who participate in the mind-body exercise—laughing yoga—the practice aids in stress reduction and other healing benefits. While there is no scientific research documenting whether laughing yoga confers the same health benefits as natural laughter, it is probable that it provides the same effects on the heart and breathing.

To date there is uncertain evidence available to make strong conclusions about the humor-health theory. Regardless, noted laughter researcher Dr. Robert Provine put it best—"Until the scientists work out all the details, get in all the laughter you can."
For more on this topic:

**Holiday Worksite Humor**

*Cartoon from the New Yorker Magazine*

"I'm afraid of it, Barker. It's a little strong, and it could be misinterpreted."

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**Send Us Your Ideas & Questions**

We want to know what worksite wellness ideas are working for your agency. We also want to hear your questions and concerns about implementing worksite wellness. Share your agency’s successes and/or questions by emailing us at:

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