

LAUGHTER – a natural, sustainable “high” in your medicine cabinet

Have you ever noticed that many people on antidepressants don't look joyful or overflowing with laughter? Many people on antidepressants say that they no longer experience highs and lows and their lives become like a “flat-line” on the heart monitor. And for those who take “happy pills”, once they experience the high, the next thing they feel is the intense low. The “happy feeling” just doesn't stick!

Why not maintain a level of happiness that you have control over, rather than depend on a quick fix that keeps you either flat-lined for a considerable length of time and perhaps creates dependency or that wears off quickly after the initial effects?

Laughter comes from within – you produce it yourself. It is a natural “high”. It can be accessed anytime and anywhere, no matter what your life circumstances are. It is also non-addictive in a “drug” sense, yet equally addictive in a positive kind of way.

Caution: Laughter has great medicinal qualities with great side effects!

Laughter is like a face-lift for your whole body. It massages your body, it tones your mind and it lifts your soul. Bring laughter out of your cosmetic kit or medicine cabinet more often. It is great for inner and outer beauty and is a great tonic for your health and happiness. So what have researchers found to be the benefits and side effects of laughter and a good sense of humour? Here are some examples:

- **Emotional Detoxification** Laughter has a similar effect to crying in that it helps give you an “emotional detox” – it dissolves tension, stress and anxiety, irritation, anger, grief and depression and releases pent-up emotions that impact your body and your health.
- **Bridge over troubled waters** Laughter can help you face challenges more easily and cope with the unexpected. Taking on a different perspective of your difficult situation and laughing can help you cross the bridge from despair to a more enjoyable place.
- **Laugh your weight off** Three common factors that lead to weight gain are boredom, loneliness and depression. “Lightening” your mood by laughing, doing activities with others and doing something that reduces your boredom, loneliness and depression can work wonders for your eating habits and weight management.
- **No longer a pain in the neck** Laughter reduces pain by releasing endorphins, the body's natural painkillers that are reportedly more potent than equivalent amounts of morphine. Laughter can also be used as a distraction from pain.
- **Infection buster** Laughter boosts and strengthens your immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting cells. Your body fights signs of infection far better when you laugh.
- **A workout without going to the gym** Laughter massages all of your body organs. A good belly laugh exercises the diaphragm, contracts the abs and even works out the

shoulders, leaving muscles more relaxed afterwards. It provides an aerobic workout for the diaphragm and increases the body's ability to use oxygen so laughter is a great workout for your heart too.

- **Lung cleanser** Respiration-wise, laughter helps empty your lungs of more air than it takes in. This creates a cleansing effect which is especially beneficial for people with breathing related illnesses and even smokers.
- **Lowers blood pressure** Stress can definitely make your blood pressure rise. Laughter however can reduce your blood pressure and hypertension therefore reducing your risk of a heart attack or stroke.
- **Love making laughter** Laughter can improve your libido and desire for more intimacy and is also a great element of fun in your love-making. Get serious about more fun in your love life.

Doom and gloom rubbish dump or laughter from the medicine cabinet

What if you have nothing to laugh or smile about? I bet you have! It's all about what you focus on. If you keep noticing and listening to doom and gloom and depressed or angry feelings then you won't find much to laugh or smile about. Focus on the good things that are happening and the small things that bring you joy, see the funny side rather than the serious side of a matter and perhaps even decide that you are no longer prepared to indulge in pity, misery and victimhood. Now that would change things for you!

Laughter – bring it out of your own treasure chest

Imagine you are your own treasure chest and your sense of humour and laughter are the items, costumes, jewellery and bits and pieces that are tucked away in this chest ready to be worn on the stage of your life. Is your sense of humour and laughter packed away in your treasure chest for which you have lost the key, or do you keep the chest open – exposing the playful and light-hearted delights within?

Do you take yourself and your life too seriously? Do you always take the cup half empty view on life? Do you lack spontaneity or a sense of wonder? Do you find yourself asking, "How the heck can I laugh or smile when life dishes me up...?" What aspects of your chest have you not shown for awhile? Which costumes have you not tried on for ages? What adornments could you start wearing? What party trick would you like to bring out? What games would you like to play? Who would you like to play with?

Even if you have to "act out your laughter" to begin with, do so because research suggests that even if you "fake" happiness, smiles and laughter, there can be positive impacts on your body and other areas of your life. Your body "acts as if"!