WLG 248

West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

# Laugh A Latte

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## Educational Objectives

1. Learn the physical, mental, and social benefits of laughter.
2. Experience laughing for the health of it.
3. Learn ways to include laughter in your life.

How can something so simple be so good for us? This topic demonstrates the importance of laughter and our good health. Why is it good to "Laugh a Latte"? Let's look at the origin of the word "latte," particularly in the use of the Latte stone, which was used as building supports by the ancient Chamorro people. Using laughter as a support to a healthier life will have strong and lasting benefits. Notice the word connections interwoven throughout this topic and how the relationship of laughter and supportive provisions for well-being is linked together. By making laughter a daily practice, we resonate the power to improve our lives.

## Let's describe laughter . . .

- Finding amusement in something
- The noise produced by laughing
- The experience of mirth, amusement, or joy

> I was so naive as a kid, I used to sneak behind the barn and do nothing.
>
> – *Johnny Carson*

***Eskimo Laughing Activity:***
Have the group pair up and face each other. One partner tries to avoid laughing, while the other partner is doing his/her best to make him/her laugh using faces, gestures, etc. You cannot break the stare, smile, or laugh. Once you do, then it is the other person's turn.

## History of therapeutic support of humor

There is a long history of using humor as a strong support for healing therapy.

- **14th century:** French surgeon Henri de Mondeville used humor in surgery recovery. He stated, "Let the surgeon take care to regulate the whole regimen of the patient's life for joy and happiness, allowing his relatives and special friends to cheer him and by having someone tell him jokes."

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- **16th century:** Martin Luther used humor therapy in pastoral counseling of depression, advising people to be with friends who joke and make them laugh. English scholar, Robert Burton used humor to cure melancholy.
- **17th century:** Sociologist Herbert Spencer used humor to release excess tension.
- **18th century:** German philosopher Immanuel Kant used humor to restore equilibrium. English physician William Battie used humor to treat patients.
- **1930s:** Clowns were brought into U.S. hospitals to cheer children hospitalized with polio.
- **1972:** The Gesundheit Institute, founded by Doctor Hunter 'Patch' Adams, brought fun and joy into health care.

- **1998:** The release of the major film, *Patch Adams*, was about humor therapy. Norman Cousins published his book *Anatomy of an Illness*, which was based on his experiences of being diagnosed with a terminal condition and using humor therapy by watching episodes of *Candid Camera* and Marx Brothers' films to overcome his illness. He claimed that ten minutes of laughter could give him two hours of pain relief.

> I don't deserve this award, but I have arthritis and I don't deserve that either.
>
> – *Jack Benny*

The benefits of laughter are numerous. Let's look at the foundational advantages of building laughter into life.

## Physical advantages of a good laugh

- Stimulates the immune system
- May help relieve pain
- Relaxes tense muscles
- Speeds up oxygen to our bodies
- Helps regulate heart rate
- Increases endorphins
- Lowers blood pressure
- Lowers serum cortisol levels
- Lowers blood sugar in Type-2 diabetes patients

Mary Payne Bennett, director of the Western Kentucky University School of Nursing, produced evidence that humor benefits the body. Her experiments evaluated the activity of natural killer cells before and after volunteers watched something funny.

Blood was drawn from the volunteers before they watched a funny video and again afterward. Bennett found that some volunteers laughed aloud, while others simply looked amused during the video. Both groups reported decreases in psychological stress; however the killer cells from the volunteers that laughed were more active against cancer cells after the funny video.

"We can say for sure that mirthful laughter causes reductions in self-reported psychological stress and it is associated with decreases in the stress hormone cortisol, which is evidence of a reduction in physiological stress," Bennett says. "Laughter is a good thing, with no major harmful side effects. This is a longstanding component of major belief systems around the world, but now we're documenting it."

According to William F. Fry, M.D., associate professor of clinical psychiatry at Stanford University, laughing 100 to 200 times per day is the cardiovascular equivalent of rowing for 10 minutes.

Dr. Lee Berk and Dr. Stanley Tan at Loma Linda University School of Medicine produced controlled studies showing that laughter lowers serum cortisol levels and increases the number

and activity of natural killer cells, showing that laughter stimulates the immune system.

Researchers are not certain why laughter appears to reduce blood sugar but suggest that it might increase the intake of energy by using abdominal muscles, or it might affect the part of the body that controls glucose levels in the blood.

## Laughter and emotional resiliency

It is hard to feel angry, depressed, anxious, or resentful while you are laughing!

Here are some emotional rewards of laughter:

- Combats stress
- Provides moments of joy
- Eases anxiety and lifts depression
- Lightens a threatening situation

Laughter raises the serotonin level in our body, which helps us feel good and makes problems seem more manageable.

***"Laugh a Latte" Activity:***
Have participants share their favorite jokes and funny stories or have prepared cards with jokes that are appropriately chosen and can be read aloud to the group.

## Benefits of laughter and mental well-being

- Great antidote to boredom and frustration
- Clears the mind for problem solving
- Gives you a different perspective on problems
- Makes it easier to cope with difficult situations

Humor promotes appreciation of life's discomforts and provides moments of joy. These positive emotions can create neurochemical changes that soften the effects of stress. In his book, *Stress without Distress*, Selye suggests that a person's understanding of stress is not completely dependent on what is happening but on how the person sees what is happening.

## Thrive socially by laughing

- Connects us with others through closeness
- Understanding that laughter is a universal language
- Breaks down barriers of culture, race, etc.
- Unites us with everyone else who is laughing
- Draws us into social relationships
- Lowers natural stranger anxiety
- Everyone loves someone who makes them laugh

One of the most essential and strongest needs of every human is to have social interactions with others. We are not an island unto ourselves, and laughter connects us on one of our most basic levels.

## Laughter yoga

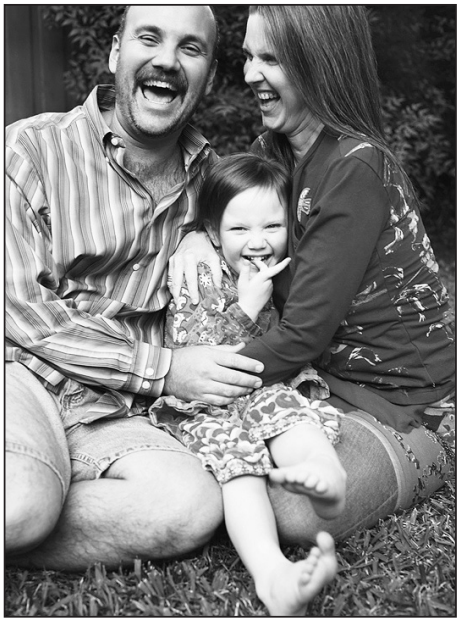
- This exercise is based on laughter, not on your mood
- Has health benefits
- Is playful – not silly
- Is a body-mind approach to laughter
- Has a goal of harmony and balance
- Helps cope with stress
- Increases productivity and creativity
- Improves communication and teamwork

Gendry, the Manhattan laughter yoga instructor largely responsible for introducing the technique in the United States, said

"This will not change your life. You will not be happy all the time from laughter yoga. I myself am not happy all the time. Sometimes, I am disturbed or unhappy. But the laughing helps me cope with the stress."

***Laughter Yoga Activity:***
Practice "Laughing Yoga" with the audience by asking them to stand and practice with you.

Tell the audience to turn and look at the person next to them. Then, do a light "ha, ha, ha." Have them continue for a few seconds. Then, tell them to stop. Now, proceed to a deeper belly laugh. They can touch their stomach and feel the "ha, ha, ha" from a deeper part of their belly, like a Santa Claus laugh. Have them continue for a few seconds. Then, tell them to stop. Ask them if they noticed that at first they were just doing the exercise, and then it became a real laugh.



If at first you don't succeed, find out if the loser gets anything.

*– William Lyon Phelps*

## Including laughter will transform your life

Practice these easy ways to laugh:

- Tune into your favorite sitcom.
- Call a friend and laugh for a few minutes.
- Send a funny email.
- Tell a joke.
- Go to a funny movie.
- Imagine something funny when things are too serious.
- Force a laugh once in a while.
- Practice laughing yoga.
- Take a humor break at work or home.
- Laugh like a child.

Bill Cosby says, "Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it."

It is challenging to force a laugh in tense situations. Finding humor in difficult situations can put things in perspective – so remember to "Laugh a Latte!"

## Suggestion

Ask one person to volunteer at each meeting for a "Laugh a Latte for a Latte Life" moment, where they share something funny.

## References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