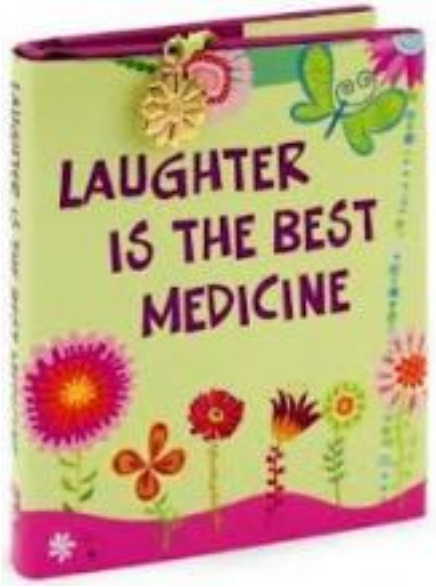
Make Laughter a Part of Your Safety Net

The findings are pretty clear: laughter certainly isn't hurting anyone.



[1]While the definitive research hasn't been completed, Robert R. Provine's ~~work~~ is ongoing and suggests strongly that laughter does, in fact, have health benefits. It's getting a lot of investigative ~~attention~~ and, in *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* [2], Provine details research that supports this conclusion. In fact, another researcher, ~~Paul E. McGhee, Ph.D~~ says, "Your sense of humor is one of the most powerful tools you have to make certain that your daily mood and emotional state support good health."

Investigative researchers have already proven:

1) Laughter is a powerful antidote to stress, pain, and conflict;

2) Nothing works faster or more dependably to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh;

3) Humor lightens your burdens, inspires hopes, connects you to others, and keeps you grounded, focused, and alert.

Authors Melinda Smith, M.A., and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D examined the research and ~~concluded~~, "With so much power to heal and renew, the ability to laugh easily and frequently is a tremendous resource for surmounting problems, enhancing your relationships, and supporting both physical and emotional health."

When it comes to general health, Smith and Segal ~~noted~~ that:

- **Laughter relaxes the whole body**, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after a good laugh.
- **Laughter boosts the immune system.** Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.
- **Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals.** Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.
- **Laughter protects the heart.** Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

But nowhere was the link between laughter and health ~~stronger than in the area of mental health.~~

- Laughter dissolves distressing emotions. You can't feel anxious, angry, or sad when you're laughing.

- Laughter helps you relax and recharge. It reduces stress and increases energy, enabling you to stay focused and accomplish more.
- Humor shifts perspective, allowing you to see situations in a more realistic, less threatening light. A humorous perspective creates psychological distance, which can help you avoid feeling overwhelmed.

So, how do you get from where you might be now (serious and stressed) - to the right (laughing and lighter) side?

Begin by setting aside special times to seek out humor and laughter, as you might with working out, and build from there. Eventually, you'll want to incorporate humor and laughter into the fabric of your life, finding it naturally in everything you do.

Here are some ways to start:

- ***Smile.*** Smiling is the beginning of laughter. Like laughter, it's contagious. Pioneers in "laugh therapy," find it's possible to laugh without even experiencing a funny event. The same holds for smiling. When you look at someone or see something even mildly pleasing, practice smiling.
- ***Count your blessings.*** Literally make a list. The simple act of considering the good things in your life will distance you from negative thoughts that are a barrier to humor and laughter.
- ***When you hear laughter, move toward it.*** Mostoften, people are very happy to share something funny because it gives them an opportunity to laugh again and feed off the humor you find in it. When you hear laughter, seek it out and join in.
- ***Spend time with fun, playful people.*** These are people who laugh easily-both at themselves and at life's absurdities -- who routinely find the humor in everyday events. Their playful point of view and laughter are contagious.
- ***Bring humor into conversations.*** Ask people, "What's the funniest thing that happened to you today? This week? In your life?"
- ***Consider getting a pet.*** Having a pet is good for your mental and physical health and people with pets tend to laugh more. Studies show that pets can protect you from depression, stress, and even heart disease.

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