

The health benefits of laughter



There are plenty of positive health benefits to be gained from indulging in a good old belly laugh as often as possible, not to mention having an optimistic outlook and a good sense of humour. We're not saying laughter is a cure-all, but it certainly doesn't do any harm and the short- and long-term effects are impressive.

Laughter doesn't only have an effect on your mood, it also has very real physical effects. According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter can increase your intake of oxygen and the amount of endorphins your brain releases, cool down your stress response, increase your heart rate and blood pressure, stimulate your circulation, and aid in muscle relaxation.

These immediate physical reactions are one thing, but what about longer term effects and potential health benefits? Although there isn't conclusive evidence that laughter in itself is a healing agent, there are plenty of studies that highlight its positive health effects.

Top three potential health benefits of laughter:

- ***It can help protect your heart.*** A study by cardiologists at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore found that people with heart disease were 40% less likely to laugh in a variety of situations compared to people of the same age without heart disease. The researchers' theory is that stress has been linked to inflammatory responses,

one of which is fat and cholesterol build-up in the arteries. This is significant because we know that laughter can cool down the stress response.

- ***It can help improve your immune system.*** According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter often evokes positive thoughts and this releases neuropeptides that help fight stress and potentially more-serious illnesses.
- ***It can act as a pain reliever.*** A study published by The Royal Society looked at the effect of laughter on people's ability to withstand pain and found that laughter increases pain thresholds both in the laboratory and under naturalistic conditions. The researchers theorise that this must be due to the endorphins released by our brains when we laugh.

The health benefits of laughter extend far and wide, so the next time you're feeling blue or just need a pick-me-up, find a way to include more laughter in your day. Think about catching up with an old friend that always makes you laugh, seeing a funny movie or booking a ticket to your favourite stand-up comedian's show.