

LAUGH THREE TIMES A DAY, BEFORE AND AFTER EACH MEAL

Last month, I joined 42 others for an inner-city tour of Melbourne. I wore headphones and a glittery hat. I danced to Abba, swirled a pirouette to Mozart, hugged trees, shuffled down Collins Street gangnam style, mimicked complete strangers, danced with tourists in Federation Square and laughed so hard I cried. I am certain that no-one could have wiped the smile off my face that night. Even now as I write, the recollection of Guru Dudu's silent disco tour of Melbourne causes my body to shift. I feel joy, inward and outward.

Why does a regular dose of laughter make a difference to our mind, body and spirit?

Since biblical times, over the centuries, philosophers, poets and writers have extolled the benefits of laughter. It took until the 20th century for researchers to take a deeper interest in what a good chuckle can do¹¹. There is not clear evidence that laughter by itself can cure disease and illness, however, experience and observations clearly indicate that laughter greatly improves our physical, psychological and social fitness.

How does it do this?

- It relieves tension by relaxing the muscles to ease stress, fear and anxiety²
- Intense laughter increases our heart rate, respiratory rate and oxygen consumption just as though an exercise routine had just been undertaken^{2,13}
- It increases our pain tolerance^{8,13}
- It supports our immune function if you laugh out loud; smiling isn't enough³
- It creates and strengthens our social bonds⁵
- It reduces tension, builds rapport and calms nerves⁸
- It increases self-esteem and decreases loneliness and depression^{1,13}
- Laughing during difficult times can be a powerful step in the healing process, supporting us to create balance and a positive disposition^{11,13}

The use of humour in different therapeutic settings has seen positive results, evidenced by the increase of programs providing laughter and humour for individuals living with dementia⁴, cancer^{9,3}, mental health conditions⁷ and old age^{10,11,12}. The use of humour by practitioners within the health care system can also prevent burnout and can support families and friends during difficult times.^{11,13}

Laughter is a universal expression¹³ and even without a common language, when we see someone laugh, it's contagious. When I was in a remote part of China trying to show the cafe owner I wanted chicken by wandering around with flapping wings and a loud squawk, all boundaries were broken down and there wasn't a dry eye in the room. Laughter doesn't just make you feel good, it also provides you with positive stories from your life that you can reflect on. This theory is supported by the positive psychology approach of broaden-and-build, providing individuals with greater resilience to get through life's hurdles by using positive emotions to counter negative downward spirals⁶.

But if you think sitting in front of YouTube or watching a comedy show for a chuckle is enough to get your funny bone in optimum working order, you may need to think again. It seems laughter alone may not be the key ingredient; it is the use of one's mind to create a game, instigate a laugh and share that has the greatest benefits¹⁰. Perhaps the first swipe of the pillow before heading to bed could be as important as intimacy, passion and commitment in strengthening our relationships.

When was the last time you laughed so hard your stomach ached? Or perhaps, your funny bone has taken a holiday with the seriousness of life toning down your laughter or you find yourself questioning others with 'what's so funny' when chuckles hit the public domain. Laughter is one of the most cost-effective ways to improve your health and well-being, relationships and attitude about yourself and the world around you.

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If you need to get your laughter on, the benefits of group laughter are much better than going solo⁸, so make sure you join one of [Guru Dudu's silent disco tours](#). Or perhaps you can get your funny bone back in working order by joining a laughter club. [Click here](#) to find one in your local area. If you have a sick child or elderly parent in a hospital or nursing home, have a look at the [Humour Foundation's](#) programs operating across Australia.

As for right now, what makes you laugh? Share your favourite funny movie, joke, story or youtube video on our Facebook page and give us all a giggle; doctor's orders. While nobody's watching, I'm off to dance in my lounge room. Where's that glittery hat?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tina Jensen is a coach and facilitator currently studying a [Masters in Wellness at RMIT](#). Based in Melbourne, Tina works with clients around the globe. In her spare time, she loves to travel, write, mentor youth at risk and is a heart and hand philanthropist often found making a difference somewhere on the planet. www.innersource.com.au.

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