

1 Free, Undeniable Way to Improve Your Health

What is a sure-fire way to improve your health that is free? Laughter. It's one of the most often overlooked ways we can, and should, live better.

Yes, the ability to laugh seems to come naturally to some people. But everyone, even the most serious personality types, can develop a funny bone. It's a wonderful way to stay healthy.

As researchers examine the keys to longevity, they are now discovering overwhelming evidence that living long has less to do with exercise and eating right than the way we THINK.

Just look at the majority of centenarians, and you'll notice they have a zest for life, a natural curiosity and, yes, a sense of humor. You'll notice a light-heartedness among people who've outlived their counterparts.

This is all about stress. Stress is far more devastating than most people realize. It literally debilitates your entire system. Anger, fear, unforgiveness and yes, a sour attitude, all contribute to stress.

Conversely, letting go of anger, resentment and not taking ourselves too seriously immediately contribute to stress relief and an overall healthier you. Research shows:

1. Laughter improves your heart. Our blood vessels function more efficiently when we laugh because blood flow increases, which protects us against heart attacks and other cardiovascular problems.

2. Laughter is a natural painkiller. Just as when we exercise, when we have a good laugh, our body releases endorphins,

nature's painkillers. They are those feel-good chemicals that make us feel happy ... some say it's like a "natural high." In fact, scientists say endorphins are so powerful, they rival the impact morphine has on our body, but with only good side effects.

3. Laughter relaxes the body. It's a natural stress reliever. In fact, the effect of a good laugh lingers for 45 minutes in the form of less physical tension and greater muscle relaxation.

4. Laughter also boosts the immune system. Tickling the funny bone causes ugly stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline to diminish. When that happens, your body increases its production of disease-fighting antibodies, which kill all those pesky bugs that circulate during cold and flu season.

So, are you one of those people who take life too seriously? You can change. Just make an effort to lighten up, and it will get easier.

So how do you laugh more?

1. The first step is to smile. Smiling leads to laughter. One thing you'll notice right away is that when you smile at people, they smile back.

2. Take it a step further, and you'll notice that laughter is contagious too. If you spend time around a bunch of people who are constantly uptight and frowning, just remember, you can single-handedly turn things around. Make it a point to joke and smile, lighten the mood whenever possible, and just watch how others will follow suit without even knowing it.

3. Seek out people who laugh and smile, and spend more time with them.

4. Watch funny television shows, movies or listen to funny podcasts or CDs in your car. Watch funny YouTube videos. But

make sure they're clean and edifying. They are out there.

5. Look at the humor in yourself and in less-than-perfect situations.

Don't be surprised if you suddenly have more friends. Everyone wants to be around people who have mastered those skills. And it only takes practice.

Laughter is a fantastic way to defuse conflict. In the morning, make a conscious effort, a vow if you will, to joke about yourself and sticky situations in the day ahead.

Having a good sense of humor isn't just about adding levity to stressful situations. It can be a way of commenting on the everyday situations as well.

I am so very grateful for the jokesters in the CBN News room. Recently on *The 700 Club*, we aired two stories about James Brown, who had an amazing Christian testimony. One of the stories was about the new biopic based on his life and the other was the re-airing of an interview James Brown did with *The 700 Club*, back in the 1980s.

One of the women in the newsroom, Andrea Garrett, in honor of our recent emphasis on James Brown, sent an email around with a link to the hilarious James Brown parody that Eddie Murphy performed on *Saturday Night Live*, which at the time was so wildly popular it became a pop-culture phenomenon. What a laugh we all had.

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