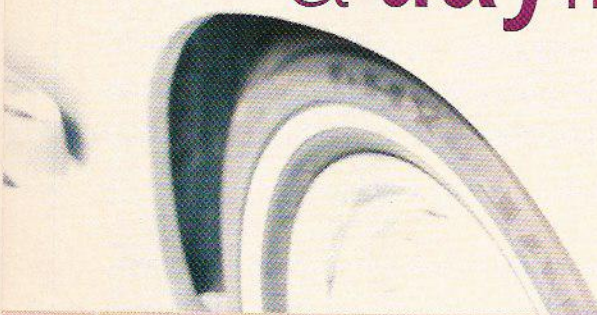


a laugh a day...



Laugh at Yourself

If you are uncomfortable laughing in a group, why not try different types of laughter in the comfort of your home? Stand in front of a mirror and run through a series of laughter types; just think of the many laughs you have. Do one laugh for 30 to 45 seconds. Take a break and breathe in deep and exhale. Stretch your neck and arms. Repeat with another laughter. Just 15 to 20 minutes a day is all it takes.

The next time you feel a flare coming on, laugh it off. Ha!, you say? Thousands of people worldwide are serious when they say laughter is the best medicine. It's evident in the more than 1,000 laughter clubs they've joined. One may be right in your backyard.

What is a laughter club? It is the brainchild of Madan Kataria, MD, a private physician in Mumbai, India. Dr. Kataria was studying how laughter benefits the mind, as well as the body. He discovered that not only did laughter relieve stress, release negative emotions, increase self-confidence and reduce inhibitions, but it also provided cardiovascular benefits and triggered the release of endorphins – chemicals secreted in the brain that provide a morphine-like, pain-relieving effect. Other research has indicated that laughter also may help control anxiety, depression, insomnia and allergies, and may lower blood pressure, risk of heart disease and even cancer. And as we laugh, there is a reduction in the production of cortisol, a natural hormone that suppresses the immune system with a prime role in the stress response.

Instead of just publishing a report on the benefits of laughter, Dr. Kataria decided to take his findings a step further and established Laughter Clubs International in 1995. That club and its sister North American organization, World Laughter Tour run by Steve Wilson, are clubs where giggle seekers can come together and – you guessed it – laugh. Instead of telling jokes, as one might imagine, members run through a series of simulated “laughters” for 15 to 20 minutes. The point is to just laugh. Types of laughter include the silent laugh with mouth wide open (when you just can't get the sound to come out because the laugh is so deep), the lion laugh (where your voice is roaring, your eyes are bulging and your hands are pawing at the air to make it stop), and the cocktail laugh (more a giggle, really).

What good is a forced laugh? Although researchers cannot find an explanation, they have discovered that forcing a smile does, in fact, bring on a happier mood while forcing a frown elicits a negative mood. They speculate the same applies to forced laughter.

Want to join a laughter club or form one in your neighborhood? Visit www.worldlaughtertour.com.

—LISSA POIROT