

Garden of the Heart Ministries

Temple Talk Teachings

Good, Like Medicine

By Renée Lubinski

Proverbs 17:22 says, "*A merry heart does good, like medicine but a broken spirit dries up the bones.*" A joy-filled inner being brings soundness to your whole body. In stark contrast, a broken, crushed spirit dries up the bones.

You can say a lot just by putting a smile on your face, did you know that? That's the first thing that people see on your body is your smile or your frown.

You ever notice how some people who attend church and sing songs about God's love look as if they were baptized in lemon juice? This fact is sadder than it is funny. As Christians we should be the happiest people on the face of the earth, with smiles that radiate God's goodness. Glum, despondent believers – why, they ought to be sued for false advertising!

When Proverbs 17:22 says that a merry heart does good for you just like medicine, there is ample amount of evidence found within medical research to back that up. Not that we need the evidence because we can take God's Word as final authority but knowing these amazing facts helps you to take a deeper look as you examine the great bodily benefits that laughter brings:

Dr. Lee Berk and fellow researcher Dr. Stanley Tan of Loma Linda University in California have been studying the effects of laughter on the immune system. To date their published studies have shown that laughing lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, increases muscle flexion, and boosts immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting T-cells, disease-fighting proteins called Gamma-interferon and B-cells, which produce disease-destroying antibodies. Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, and produces a general sense of well-being.

In Berk's study, the physiological response produced by belly laughter was opposite of what is seen in classical stress, supporting the conclusion that mirthful laughter is a eustress state -- a state that produces healthy or positive emotions.

Following is a summary of his research, taken from an interview published in the September/October 1996 issue of the Humor and Health Journal, indicating that after exposure to humor, there is an increase in activity within the immune system, including:

- ♥ An increase in the number and activity level of natural killer cells that attack viral infected cells and some types of cancer and tumor cells.
- ♥ An increase in activated T cells (T lymphocytes). There are many T cells that await activation. Laughter appears to tell the immune system to "turn it up a notch."
- ♥ An increase in gamma interferon, which tells various components of the immune system to "turn on."

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♥ An increase in IgB, the immunoglobulin produced in the greatest quantity in body, as well as an increase in Complement 3, which helps antibodies to pierce dysfunctional or infected cells. The increase in both substances was not only present while subjects watched a humor video; there also was a lingering effect that continued to show increased levels the next day.

♥ An increase in the antibody IgA (immunoglobulin A), which fights upper respiratory tract insults and infections.

The results of the study also supported research indicating a general decrease in stress hormones that constrict blood vessels and suppress immune activity. These were shown to decrease in the study group exposed to humor.

For example, levels of epinephrine were lower in the group both in anticipation of humor and after exposure to humor. Epinephrine levels remained down throughout the experiment.

In addition, dopamine levels (as measured by dopac) were also decreased. Dopamine is involved in the "fight or flight response" and is associated with elevated blood pressure.

Laughing is heart-healthy, providing a workout for the diaphragm and increasing the body's ability to use oxygen.

Laughter brings in positive emotions that can enhance conventional treatments. Hence it is another tool available to help fight disease.

Experts believe that laughter reduces pain and aids the healing process (just what God shows us in His powerful Word – the Bible). Laughter is the best medicine because it causes the release of bodily chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins are natural pain killers and they create a sense of well-being within us. Therefore, laughter offers a powerful distraction from pain, allowing a person to "forget" about physical pains such as aches, arthritis, etc due to increasing those endorphin levels in the body.

In a study published in the Journal of Holistic Nursing, patients were told one-liners after surgery and before painful medication was administered. Those exposed to humor perceived less pain when compared to patients who didn't get a dose of humor as part of their therapy.

Muscle Relaxation - Belly laugh results in muscle relaxation. While you laugh, the muscles that do not participate in the belly laugh, relaxes. After you finish laughing those muscles involved in the laughter start to relax. So, the action takes place in two stages.

Respiration - Frequent belly laughter empties your lungs of more air than it takes in resulting in a cleansing effect - similar to deep breathing.

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Not only does joy do a body good even to the bones, but another verse in Proverbs out of 15:15 says, "*A cheerful heart has a continual feast.*" And which is a greater witness to a lost world; a cheerful heart or a downcast spirit?

Here are some wrap-it-up facts about taking time out for a merry heart:

1. The average man or woman laughs about 4 to 8 times a day. The average child laughs about 150 times a day.
2. Laughter is able to raise your energy level and pull you out of the pit of depression. It actually releases tension, anxiety, anger, fear, shame, and guilt and can completely change one's attitude.
3. Like a massage, a good belly laugh is able to stimulate all the major organs. Belly laughter is equivalent to "an internal jogging" thus providing good cardiac conditioning especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercises.

I encourage you to take time out of your busy day for a good, healthy belly laugh. Why not spend time with that joy-filled friend that knows how to have fun, even if it's just a moment on the telephone. Or, find a young child and laugh some good quality time away as you play. You'll be happy you did!

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In addition to writing Temple Talk articles and recipes, Renée Lubinski is a [speaker](#) for women's conferences, workshops, seminars and retreats. Feedback is warmly welcomed, so please feel free to [email](#) her with your comments, questions or suggestions!

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