

# Health Tips

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with

Dr. D


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## Health Tip: Is laughter the best medicine?

April 14 is the International Day of Laughter. We've all heard that "laughter is the best medicine", but what is the evidence that supports this?



Most of the research on laughter starts with the hypothesis that it should be good for you. And why wouldn't it be, don't you feel better after a good belly laugh? Why wouldn't this translate into general contentedness, better immune function, and improved longevity? Research that sets out to prove an obvious premise, however, is often flawed from the onset. We shouldn't be too quick to attribute something that feels good to actually being good as far as our health is concerned. If this was the case, eating bon-bons while receiving a massage could be construed as the key to

health for many of us.

Unfortunately, there is relatively little firm scientific evidence that shows that laughter is clearly beneficial to us. Could it be that those with a well-developed appreciation of humor are somehow wired differently than others? For example, a study demonstrating that people who laugh more are sick less often could be because healthier people have more to laugh about. Clearly, the concept of the jolly, overweight individual is flawed. First of all, there is no data to support the notion that overweight people are necessarily happier and furthermore, it is clear that obesity represents a serious health risk.

Granted, there have been some studies that have demonstrated health benefits from laughter. In the behavioral science literature, a well-developed sense of humor has been shown to provide benefits in regard to coping ability as well as reducing the level of hormones (cortisol, epinephrine, etc.) associated with stress. Some studies have shown that humor may raise the level of infection-fighting antibodies in the body and improve immune function. Research from the University of Maryland indicates that there may be cardiovascular benefits from laughter also. In studies that were published several years ago, cardiologists at that institution claimed that people with heart disease were 40 percent less likely to laugh in a variety of situations as compared to people of the same age but without heart disease. Their research showed that those with heart attacks generally laughed less, even in positive situations, and displayed more anger and hostility. Of course, this does not mean that "learning" to laugh could help prevent heart disease. In fact, is a good sense of humor something that can be

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Whether or not there are health benefits to laughter, it is generally a very pleasant activity. Laughter connects us with other people, helps ease tension and is a socially acceptable way of releasing anger and frustration. It keeps us from taking ourselves too seriously and allows us to deal with our limitations or flaws. Some things just seem to be better for you, whether there is proof of it or not. To me, laughter is one of them. It doesn't have any calories or cholesterol. It isn't expensive and is unlikely to result in injury. Circumstances always seem better when we are laughing rather than brooding over something. If the whole world was to lighten up a bit and we'd learn to laugh at ourselves more, I do believe that it would be a better place. To heck with the science, for most of us, laughter may be the best medicine.



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