

# Your Health is a Laughing Matter

**A dose of laughter may keep the doctor away.**

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Have you ever laughed so hard your stomach hurt? When we laugh, there is a softening of the body—particularly in the heart centre, a release of tension and a workout for the abdominal muscles. If you have a good, long laugh everyday, you will not have to do anymore abdominal exercises and it's much more fun and social.

Medical professionals recognize a sense of humour as an important component in the healing process. Two researchers from Loma Linda University in California, Dr. Lee Berk and Dr. Stanley Tan have studies that show laughter helps lower blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, increases muscle flexion and boosts our immune system. Laughter provides good cardiac conditioning—it is like an internal jogging as it provides a massage for the internal organs. It offers benefits to the respiratory system in that it has a cleansing effect on the lungs that is similar to deep breathing. Laughter is also a contributor to pain reduction because it triggers the release of endorphins, which are the body's natural "pain killers".

Studies also show that people suffering from depression may be more prone to heart disease, high blood pressure and cancer. In addition to the physical benefits it offers, laughter can bring levity and a sense of hope to people who are sad or feel socially isolated. Dr. Kataria is a doctor in India who started a laughter club which incorporates laughing in a yoga practice. The club's motto is "fake it until you make it." Since it may be difficult sometimes to laugh or smile, this practice of faking laughter in a community of friends eventually leads to genuine laughter.

The health benefits of laughter come from the wonderful way it creates a sense of sharing, community and social support but it is also helpful in "warming up" your intimate relationship. Laughter helps people connect as well as to create and maintain healthy relationships. In it's discussion of the work of neuroscientist Dr. Provine, Psychology

Today states that the levity resulting from laughter can defuse anger and anxiety and open the way for intimacy: “Laughter establishes—or restores—a positive emotional climate and a sense of connection between two people, who literally take pleasure in the company of each other.” So, when you have an argument with your spouse, end it with a tickle rather than a pout.

It’s true that there are situations in life and work that are serious, but many times it is ourselves that we don’t have to take too seriously. Laughter really is the best medicine mostly because it is free and has no known negative side effects. So, along with the apple a day, add a dose of laughter to keep the doctor away.

**ABOUT ESTHER CIERI**

ESTHER CIERI IS A CERTIFIED HATHA YOGA TEACHER AND A CERTIFIED MEMBER OF THE FEDERATION OF ONTARIO YOGA TEACHERS. ESTHER OWNS AND OPERATES BODY WISDOM, A COMPANY THAT OFFERS YOGA AND PILATES AS WELL AS CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAMS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA. VISIT [BODYWISDOMYOGA.CA](http://BODYWISDOMYOGA.CA) OR CONTACT HER AT [ESTHER@BODYWISDOMYOGA.CA](mailto:ESTHER@BODYWISDOMYOGA.CA) AND 416-809-8629.