

Laughter Is Good for You

By Irv Sternberg

It's common knowledge that laughter is good for you.

A hearty laugh can protect you from the damaging effects of stress, strengthen your immune system, reduce pain and boost your mood.

Laughter relaxes the whole body. A hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed up to 45 minutes later. It decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells, improving your resistance to disease.

We know that laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. It gives you a sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain. A good laugh can improve the function of blood vessels and increase blood flow, thereby protecting you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems. Have you ever heard of anyone having a heart attack caused by a good laugh?

If you laugh a lot you'll burn calories and lose weight. Laughter also diffuses anger and conflict; it's hard to have a nasty argument when you're discussing something funny. Humor helps look at things in perspective and enables you move on from confrontations without feeling bitter or resentful.

A person with a strong sense of humor outlives those who don't laugh as much, according to a recent study in Norway. The difference was particularly notable for those battling cancer.

In short, humor helps you keep a positive, optimistic outlook through difficult situations, disappointments and loss.

For that reason I've adopted a new attitude at this stage of my life. I seek out funny people, at least those with a healthy sense of humor, positive people who see the glass half full rather than half empty. I try to avoid complainers and whiners, those who routinely blame others for their problems and see the world as a dark, foreboding place. I prefer to view the flowers, the snow-covered mountains and the streams sparkling in the sun.

I like the fact that we frequently begin our Monday morning sessions with a joke. A good belly laugh is a delightful way to start the week. I urge everyone to come ready to tell a joke every Monday morning. I promise you it'll make you feel good to hear others laugh.