

## DAY 46: The Power of Laughter and Joy

**W**hen people come into my office to be treated or placed on a nutritional program, I often ask them, “How often do you laugh?” You should see the looks they give me. A common response in cancer patients is, “I never laugh.” I can tell they’re thinking, *I have cancer, Dr. Colbert. What is there to laugh about?*

One of the most unusual prescriptions I give to many of my patients is to have at least ten belly laughs a day. True laughing offers one of the most powerful and natural healing methods without any side effects. Laughter lowers the stress hormones cortisol and epinephrine. It increases feel-good hormones. It keeps you squarely in the present moment. It helps you to reframe and feel thankful and helps you to see negative events in a more positive light. There’s not a single bad thing laughter will do for your body and mind.

One study, however, stated that Americans feel happy just 54 percent of the time. They say they feel neutral about 25 percent of the time and sad 21 percent of the time.<sup>1</sup> If that’s true, there are not a lot of happy people in the United States.

Has it ever occurred to you that you were created to be happy and filled with joy? The Bible declares:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

—PHILIPPIANS 4:4, NIV

The psalmist declared of God:

You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

—PSALM 16:11, NKJV

Nehemiah told the workers who were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem:

The joy of the LORD is your strength.

—NEHEMIAH 8:10

Jesus told the disciples:

These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

—JOHN 15:11, NKJV



Isn't it comforting to know that during His last night on Earth, Jesus' main concern was that His followers have joy?

### Benefits of Happiness

I believe the Bible is so emphatic about joy because joy sustains life: "A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Proverbs 17:22, NIV). That is literally true. According to Rich Bayer, PhD, CEO of Upper Bay Counseling and Support Services, Inc., happy people have more social contact and better social relations than their unhappy counterparts. Studies of positive people show that they rate high on having good relationships with themselves and with others. Their love life is better as well. Happy people tend to be kinder to others and to express empathy more easily. They also have the ability to use their intelligence more effectively. Some studies show that people become better students when they are feeling happy.<sup>2</sup>

#### Chuckle for the Day

The new pastor was visiting in the homes of his parishioners. At one house it seemed obvious that someone was at home, but no answer came to his repeated knocks at the door. He took out a card and wrote Revelation 3:20, which says "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," and stuck it in the door jam.

The following Sunday when the offering was processed, he found that his card had been returned with this cryptic message, and he burst into laughter. The message added was from Genesis 3:10, which reads, "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid for I was naked."

Of course, happy people are not "luckier" than other people. They experience tragedy and hardship, but studies show that happy people do a better job of reframing.<sup>3</sup> They remember the good events in their lives more readily, and when bad things happen, they believe things will eventually be all right. They have hope.

Happiness is one of the keys to long, satisfying life. Studies also show that happy people have fewer health problems.<sup>4</sup> Research among older people indicates that folks with positive emotions outlive their sour counterparts. Happy people were shown to be half as likely to become disabled as sad people in the same age bracket. And happy people have a higher pain threshold than those who are sad.<sup>5</sup>

When you laugh, powerful chemicals called endorphins, which act much the same way as morphine, are released in the brain. Endorphins trigger a feeling of well-being throughout your entire body and relieve pain.

In the Department of Behavioral Medicine of the UCLA Medical School, a man named Norman Cousins conducted extensive research into

## Dr. Colbert Approved

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the physical benefits of happiness. He established the Humor Research Task Force that coordinated worldwide clinical research on humor. His research proved conclusively that laughter, happiness, and joy are perfect antidotes for stress.<sup>6</sup>

A good hearty laugh can help:

- Reduce stress
- Lower blood pressure
- Elevate mood
- Boost the immune system
- Improve brain functioning
- Protect the heart
- Connect you to others
- Foster instant relaxation
- Make you feel good<sup>7</sup>

According to the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, “Without humor one’s thought processes are likely to become stuck and narrowly focused, leading to increased distress.”<sup>8</sup>

Choosing a good attitude doesn’t diminish the amount of suffering in your life or in the world, but it helps to lighten the load. Even when we suffer, we can choose to be joyful, because He is with us.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Lee Berk and fellow researcher Dr. Stanley Tan of Loma Linda University in California studied the effects of laughter on the immune system and found a general decrease in stress hormones that constrict blood vessels and suppress immune activity in people exposed to humor. Levels of the stress hormone epinephrine were lower in the

### Did You Know...?

Some researchers contend that twenty seconds of belly laughter is equivalent to three minutes of working out on a rowing machine.<sup>10</sup>



group both in anticipation of humor and after exposure to humor. Epinephrine levels remained down throughout the experiment.<sup>11</sup>

I recommend to all my patients ten belly laughs a day. I prescribe Carol Burnett DVDs, *Sanford and Son* DVDs, and other clean humor to my patients. Create a habit of happiness instead of a habit of worry. Your happiness is not at the mercy of other people or life circumstances and events. A merry heart is your greatest weapon against stress. For more information on this topic please refer to my book *Deadly Emotions*.<sup>12</sup>

### **BUILDING BLOCKS TO A HEALTHY LIFE**

*POINTS TO PONDER: Create a habit of happiness and laughter instead of a habit of worry. When you laugh, it lowers stress hormones and relieves stress. Laughter also boosts the immune system, protects the heart, and improves overall health. Ten belly laughs a day are equivalent to getting a good aerobic exercise workout, and they're the ultimate "stress buster."*

*ACTION STEP: Find a TV show or movie with clean humor, watch it tonight, and laugh a lot!*