

'Laughter Yoga' Helps Cancer Patients Cope

By TOMISE MARTIN
M.D. Anderson Cancer Center

To help cancer patients better cope with their diagnoses, The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center has added laughter yoga to its extensive list of complementary and integrative therapies.

"By its very nature, M.D. Anderson is a serious place. People are dealing with varying degrees of stress, anger, grief and pain," said M.D. Anderson chaplain Stephen Findley. "This practice allows patients to take 25 minutes to forget about their troubles and to rekindle joy in their lives."

Created by Indian physician and holistic enthusiast Madan Kataria in 1995, laughter yoga combines humor, gentle exercises and stretches, and yogic breaths. The practice is inspired by the belief that simulated hilarity has the same benefits as genuine laughter and creates an environment where jokes and words are not needed, only amusement and a child-like attitude.

"Cancer patients deal with a lot of stress and anxiety," said Findley, a certified laughter yoga facilitator. "With something as basic as expressing joy, they can release tension and hopefully view a difficult situation like fighting cancer as manageable."

The sessions have three parts: rhythmic clapping and chanting; laughter exercises; and meditation. One of the exercises involves conducting a "body scan." Starting at the head, patients use their finger to scan their body for pain or discomfort. When an ache is found, everyone is instructed to find amusement in that ache and then express it.

"Laughter yoga allows us to incorporate humor in cancer care and help patients discover a playfulness that reduces stress and anxiety and increases their pain tolerance," said Moshe Frenkel, M.D., medical director of the Integrative Medicine Program at M.D. Anderson. "We know from multiple studies that laughter causes a positive physiological response – it lowers cortisol levels, improves our immune system function as noted by increased natural killer cells and endorphins, and above all, reduces stress and anxiety."

Chaplains Findley and Christiana Liem are certified laughter yoga leaders with the Dr. Kataria School of Laughter Yoga and facilitate three classes per month at M.D. Anderson. The class is open to all touched by cancer and is free of charge. For a complementary and integrative medicine therapy schedule, visit www.mdanderson.org/departments/wellness

tdmartin@mdanderson.org



[Enlarge this image](#)

Why laughing until it hurts makes you happy

james gorman

From Thursday's Globe and Mail

Published Wednesday, Sep. 14, 2011 4:59PM EDT

Last updated Wednesday, Sep. 14, 2011 5:37PM EDT

Laughter is regularly promoted as a source of health and well being, but it has been hard to pin down exactly why laughing until it hurts feels so good.

The answer, reports Robin Dunbar, an evolutionary psychologist at Oxford, is not the intellectual pleasure of cerebral humour, but the physical act of laughing. The simple muscular exertions involved in producing the familiar ha, ha, ha, he said, trigger an increase in endorphins, the brain chemicals known for their feel-good effect.

His results build on a long history of scientific attempts to understand a deceptively simple and universal behaviour. “Laughter is very weird stuff, actually. That’s why we got interested in it,” Dr. Dunbar said. And the findings fit well with a growing sense that laughter contributes to group bonding and may have been important in the evolution of highly social humans.

Social laughter, he suggests, relaxed and contagious, is “grooming at a distance,” an activity that fosters closeness in a group the way one-on-one grooming, patting and delousing promote and maintain bonds between individual primates of all sorts.

In five sets of studies in the laboratory and one field study at comedy performances, Dr. Dunbar and colleagues tested resistance to pain both before and after bouts of social laughter. The pain came from a freezing wine sleeve slipped over a forearm, an ever tightening blood pressure cuff or an excruciating ski exercise.

The findings, published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, eliminated the possibility that the pain resistance measured was the result of a general sense of well being rather than actual laughter. And, he said, they also provided a partial answer to the ageless conundrum of whether we laugh because we feel giddy, or feel giddy because we laugh.

“The causal sequence is laughter triggers endorphin activation,” he said. What triggers laughter is a question that leads into a different labyrinth.

Robert Provine, a neuroscientist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and the author of “Laughter: A Scientific Investigation,” said he thought the study was “a significant contribution” to a field of study that dates back 2,000 years or so.



[Enlarge this image](#)

Why laughing until it hurts makes you happy

james gorman

From Thursday's Globe and Mail

Published Wednesday, Sep. 14, 2011 4:59PM EDT

Last updated Wednesday, Sep. 14, 2011 5:37PM EDT

Laughter is regularly promoted as a source of health and well being, but it has been hard to pin down exactly why laughing until it hurts feels so good.

The answer, reports Robin Dunbar, an evolutionary psychologist at Oxford, is not the intellectual pleasure of cerebral humour, but the physical act of laughing. The simple muscular exertions involved in producing the familiar ha, ha, ha, he said, trigger an increase in endorphins, the brain chemicals known for their feel-good effect.

His results build on a long history of scientific attempts to understand a deceptively simple and universal behaviour. "Laughter is very weird stuff, actually. That's why we got interested in it," Dr. Dunbar said. And the findings fit well with a growing sense that laughter contributes to group bonding and may have been important in the evolution of highly social humans.

Social laughter, he suggests, relaxed and contagious, is "grooming at a distance," an activity that fosters closeness in a group the way one-on-one grooming, patting and delousing promote and maintain bonds between individual primates of all sorts.

In five sets of studies in the laboratory and one field study at comedy performances, Dr. Dunbar and colleagues tested resistance to pain both before and after bouts of social laughter. The pain came from a freezing wine sleeve slipped over a forearm, an ever tightening blood pressure cuff or an excruciating ski exercise.

The findings, published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, eliminated the possibility that the pain resistance measured was the result of a general sense of well being rather than actual laughter. And, he said, they also provided a partial answer to the ageless conundrum of whether we laugh because we feel giddy, or feel giddy because we laugh.

"The causal sequence is laughter triggers endorphin activation," he said. What triggers laughter is a question that leads into a different labyrinth.

Robert Provine, a neuroscientist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and the author of "Laughter: A Scientific Investigation," said he thought the study was "a significant contribution" to a field of study that dates back 2,000 years or so.

10 ideas to blend the energy of laughter into your daily life

The following ideas will only make sense to you if you understand that laughter can be simulated and the outcome of a choice rather than a response to an external stimuli. The impact of that awareness is significant, because it means that how you feel or what you think at any given point in time do not matter. You can always choose to laugh. The physical benefits of laughter are linked to its duration and intensity, not to what motivates you to laugh.

Become a smile millionaire. The more genuine smiles you'll give, the more you will receive. It is said that the highest form of laughter is the Buddha smile, denoting an inner attitude of detachment "in the world, but not of the world."

Conditional training. Laugh every time you take a shower, or open the door of your car, fridge, bedroom...

Laugh in public spaces. It may help you not to make eye contact with anybody around you, and find a socially acceptable way to do it. This could be reading a book, or putting a headset on your head, or a cellphone to your ear.

Laugh in the bathroom or your car.

Laugh when you wake up! Bring your hands to you as you inhale and create tension in the lungs, then laugh as you exhale.

Laugh while doing things you don't like doing. It will help protect you from developing a negative mood.

Liberated laughter. Stand in front of a mirror and look seriously at your face. Then, begin to practice different smiles. After smiling, begin to practice different laughs. Pretend you are an actor and need to laugh for a part you are playing.

Sing and laugh. Sing in "Ha Has" instead of words, and use "Hey!" to punctuate each line.

The Ha-Ha-Ha mantra. Voice out loud something that is frustrating or painful in your life, and punctuate each sentence with "Ha-Ha-Ha". (See <http://lou.pm/hahamantra>.) "You Tube"

Why not laugh when you walk? You can do this mouth open or closed.

Chatelaine – January 2012

Laughter is the best-kept health secret From your heart to your immune system, the health benefits of humour extend far beyond a good mood

Karyn Gordon Sat Jan 14 2012

Amazing things happen to your body when you laugh. On top of releasing mood-elevating chemicals like serotonin and endorphins, the typical giggle fit can trigger an immediate physiological response: Your heart rate increases, your blood vessels expand, and you take in more oxygen. This increases blood flow, relaxes muscles, and regulates blood pressure.

In fact, your body's response when you laugh can even help reduce tension and relieve pain. Of course, laughter is also a powerful relationship tool. When people laugh it puts others at ease and helps make everyone feel more tolerant and less irritable. At the end of the day, there's nothing like a good belly laugh to reduce stress. Bring more humour to your life by booking a date with your funniest friend (we all have one!) or watching a silly video on YouTube. And never underestimate the power of poking fun at yourself.

Three surprising reasons to laugh

1. It fights disease: U.S. research suggests people who laugh a lot are less likely to get cancer and more likely to beat the disease if diagnosed. One study also revealed that laughter may protect against heart attacks and found people with cardiac disease are 40 percent less likely to laugh at things than others.

2. It breaks the ice: To feel more at ease in a room full of strangers, tune in to the sound of laughter. Then walk over to that spot. Not only is laughter contagious, it's a great bonding tool. And even if you don't join in the conversation, simply hearing laughter will help put a smile on your face, which will make you appear more easygoing and approachable.

3. It boosts salary: One survey of successful business executives found that those whose performance was rated as outstanding used more humour than their counterparts. Even better news? They got bigger bonuses.

Karyn Gordon is a leading relationship expert. Watch her Wednesdays on CityLine (9 a.m. EST) or visit her website for more great advice.