



Laughter and play are two of the most powerful tools in the 'survival tool kit' hard-wired into every human being at birth. Babies and children do both spontaneously, with profound effects on their health and well-being.

But many of us have had this natural impulse 'knocked out of us'. There is an inhibiting perception that people who laugh are not successful, dependable or 'to be taken seriously', which has led to the hijacking of laughter by 'power politics'... if the boss laughs, we all laugh!

This subduing of something that is natural and healing can have profound effects on our bodies and minds. We can however learn to 'reclaim our laughter', letting it work its magic to facilitate health and healing in our lives.

A famous study shows that 30 minutes of 'mirthful laughter' (watching a funny movie) decreases levels of the stress hormone cortisol in the blood by up to 87%. Cortisol and adrenalin are great in emergencies but when the body doesn't get a chance to return to normal, damaging chronic stress occurs.

Prolonged high cortisol levels interfere with desirable processes like: thyroid function, mental performance, bone density, muscle tissue, inflammatory response and immune function, and tend to create such unwanted effects as blood sugar imbalances, increase in abdominal fat ('apple' pattern) and raised blood pressure.

For healthy cortisol levels it is essential to invoke the body's relaxation response after each 'fight or flight' occasion. Laughter is Nature's built-in 'reset button' and if you laugh as we did as children up to 400 times a day your cortisol levels will be exemplary, whatever life is chucking at you! Even the mere act of smiling has been shown to reverse the stress response in our neuro-endocrine system and stimulate our brain waves into patterns of deep healing and longevity.

There are of course many other ways that laughter benefits our bodies and our minds...

Laughter helps you relax.

When you laugh you lose muscle control because laughter has a profoundly relaxing effect on the muscles.

Laughter re-oxygenates your blood. Laughter alters your breathing cycle: more oxygen is inhaled and more toxic carbon dioxide is exhaled. All that fresh air brings more oxygen into your body and in turn into the blood.

Laughter is good exercise. Did you ever feel exhausted from a hearty bout of laughter? This is because laughter acts on your body as exertion. According to Dr. William Fry at Stanford University, one minute of laughter is

'equal to 10 minutes on the rowing machine'.

Laughter lowers your blood pressure.

There is compelling evidence that regular vigorous laughter can permanently reduce blood pressure with no side effects! People who laugh heartily on a regular basis have lower standing blood pressure than the average person. The way it works is that when you have a good laugh, initially the blood pressure increases – just long enough to boost oxygen and blood supply to tissues – which beneficially expands and energises the whole system. But then it decreases and tends to settle at levels below your normal rate.

KIT'S TOP 12 "WHY LAUGH?" TIPS

1. Laughter relaxes tight muscles – that's why you can sometimes nearly fall over!
2. Laughter gives your oblique muscles a good workout – that's why your sides ache
3. Laughter refreshes the stale air that can get stuck in your lungs
4. Laughter re-oxygenates your blood.
5. Laughter bounces your internal organs around & gives them a healthy massage – they like that!
6. One minute of Laughter = 10 minutes on the rowing machine – Dr William Fry
7. Laughter can reduce your blood pressure – with no side effects.
8. Laughter reduces your blood cortisol levels – that's better than good – its great!
9. Laughter boosts your immune system.
10. A smile is the best beauty treatment there is!
11. Laughter is Nature's stress reset button
12. Just the act of smiling fights depression

Laughter boosts immune function.

Research carried out at Waterloo University in Ontario has established that exposure to laughter improves immune system functioning and increases antibodies in the bloodstream – and significant rises in the body's natural defences.

Laughter helps relieve pain.

We feel like the world is sunnier after a spell of laughter. This is because laughter releases endorphins, the body's natural source of pain killers. Endorphins have such a dramatic effect on pain that 'clown doctors' are used by some enterprising hospitals to assist with pain management – particularly with children!

Of course, like everything else we can do to heal ourselves, laughter and play need to become part of our daily routines. Here are some tips that might help:

1. Take up skipping (Step – hop, step – hop). It is great exercise and I have yet to find anyone who can keep a straight face while doing it!
2. Make it a rule to choose funny books, films and programs whenever life is stressful

– and decide that you *are* a person who laughs out loud.

3. You can get small pots of 'blowing bubbles' that hang round your neck. Wear one regularly and try blowing bubbles at people instead of arguing with them!

4. Contact your nearest Laughter Network member (laughternetwork.co.uk) who will help increase the laughter in your life. Suggest that your employer or club invites them to give you all a Laughter Session and then train to be a Laughter Leader yourself.

5. Get a copy of my book, *It Could Be Verse, An Anthology of Laughter Quotations* and keep it in the loo to remind yourself of all the wonderful reasons to laugh as much as you can every single day of your life!

Blessings, Kit Hammond Stapely

Kit Hammond Stapely pulled off a miracle when her cancer diagnosis became critical in 1998 and credits laughter and humour for helping her ride lightly enough over heavy ground to triumph.

You can read more about her at

www.miraclesdohappen.org.uk

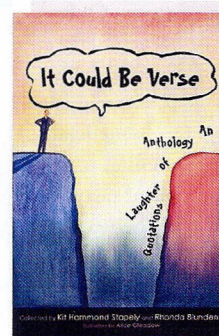
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and teaches the course based on Louise Hay's *Love Yourself: Heal Your Life* www.dialogues.co.uk



IT COULD BE VERSE
Kit Hammond Stapely & Rhonda Blunden

Isn't it great to laugh in the face of stress? If you, or a loved one, is suffering from stress, this could be just that tonic. It's simple, it's easy and

it's fun. The verses, quotes and insights within are from an eclectic and esteemed group, including Lord Byron, Andrew Carnegie, Charles Darwin, Emerson, JFK, Abraham Lincoln, Plato, Will Rogers and Dostoevsky, who serve to gently remind you that laughter is the very best of medicines. Gathered by laughter facilitator Kit Hammond Stapely Rhonda Blunden, *It Could Be Verse*, gives you the ammunition to blast the destructive power of stress and the pressure of stressful situations out of your life. It will be your companion in providing a cure for stress. You'll not only find relief from the current stress you're trying to deal with – but you'll be better equipped to fight it off in the future. Buy this book for yourself and, says Kit, in a few hours you could feel stress free. Why not give this book to a loved one or friend and help them turn their life around and live a happy life?

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