

## Indulge Your Funny Bone

Retirees overflowed the meeting room, full of questions about their health insurance. The Group Health speaker took the floor, sharing his email password, “golf not today”. The group’s instant laughter cleared the tension in the air, and we were ready to listen. Humor puts people at ease.

Laughing together improves communication and relationships. A 1985 *Parade* magazine poll reported the number one criteria for their readers in choosing a mate was being able to laugh together. Chortling, peeling, roaring, bubbling, chuckling, giggling, snickering, snorting, guffawing—it’s a salve for the body, mind and spirit. Indulge your funny bone and discover why laughter is the best medicine.

Humor is a work-out for the brain. Every time you hear a joke your brain goes to alert status:

- First the language center on the left side of your brain makes sense of the words.
- The message then crosses to the right frontal cortex to where emotional and social memories are stored.
- The joke and your memories are shuffled until they “click” or connect.
- “The light goes on” and you get the joke.
- The brain pumps out dopamine, a “feel good” or reward chemical.
- Your laugh begins in the brain stem at the base of your skull and spreads to your voice, your eyes, and your face even brightens.
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All this happens in seconds, although it takes longer than others for some people. Sometimes you hear isolated, delayed titters of laughter. That sets off another round--It’s contagious!

Happiness over time boosts the immune system, relieves depression, and balances the entire nervous system. Poking fun at ourselves works best for health. Sarcasm and cutting other people down can have very different results for health and well being.

Some of my favorite positively humorous folks believe laughter will make us happy, healthy and wise. I have a set of 11 Carol Burnet Show DVD’s on hand for health and humor emergencies. Dr. Bernie Siegel’s *Love, Medicine and Miracles* has been a standby for many years. His new book, *Humor and Healing* is on its way to my book shelves. The greeting card aisle offers a quick boost—especially together with a friend. Dave Barry’s newspaper columns have become humor classics. Another great source for wordplay, jokes and cartoons, check out *Readers’ Digest* magazine and online at <http://RDHumor@newsletters.rd.com> .

The “real” Dr. Patch Adams tells us, “We have to get people laughing because it provides balance in people’s lives, it helps people cope better and it helps them stay well.”

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