

A Laugh a Day Keeps the Doctor Away



By Dr. Jean-Jacques Dugoua, ND

Life in the 20th century is definitely stressful. In many households, parents balance work with family activities and the children's schedules. Work, school, financial worries and relationships are just a few common sources of stress that patients report when they come to my office for treatment. There are several ways to manage stress, but my favorite is laughter.

Not just funny business

In addition to the joy of having a good laugh, there are several health benefits attributed to laughter. Laughter is believed to improve immune function, increase pain tolerance, decrease the stress response and it may be good for the heart. A recent survey of rural Midwestern cancer patients revealed that humor was one of the most frequently used complementary therapies. Of 105 women diagnosed with breast cancer, 21% used humor or laughter therapy as a way to reduce stress.

Laughter, stress and the immune system

Researchers in the field of mind-nerve-immune medicine (psychoneuroimmunology) suggest that laughter not only has psychological benefits, but it also has a positive physiological effect on the immune system. A study was conducted on 33 healthy women to determine the effect of laughter on self-reported stress and natural killer cell activity. Natural killer cells are a type of white blood cell that plays an important role in the body's immune system. Low natural killer cell activity is linked to decreased disease resistance and increased morbidity in persons with cancer and HIV.

In this study, one group of subjects viewed a humorous video while another group of subjects (control group) viewed a tourism video. All subjects were then tested using a Stress Arousal Check List, a Humor Response Scale and an assay to assess immune function. The researchers observed that stress decreased for subjects in the humor group compared with those in the control group. They also observed that subjects in the control group had increased immune function and higher natural killer cell activity. The researchers concluded that laughter reduces stress and improves natural cell activity.

Stress relief

Stress has been shown to depress the immune system and laughter may be a way of alleviating some of the burden of chronic stress. Supplements such as ashwaghandha and reloro have been shown to offset some of the negative effects of stress on your body.