



## **A Laughing Matter**

Laughs, giggles, and chortles are generally saved for after work – or even not at all with the worries and stresses most busy executives face. But all this somber demeanor is just plain unhealthy.

Speaking scientifically; gelotology, the psychological and physiological study of laughter and how it affects the human body is a term derived from the Greek "gelo". Thus, a gelotologist runs gelototherapy studies to encourage the exercise of the gelastic muscles to cause gelotolepsy while gauging patients with a gelotometer. Say that three times fast!

Now that you know the science and terminology – and you already know that laughing is fun, you should know that laughing can make you a more efficient executive and a healthier person.

While we can't recommend laughing as a replacement for exercise, scientists find that a deep belly chortle is like jogging for your insides. Enough laughing can even provide some decent cardiac conditioning because frequent belly guffaws will push more air out of your lungs than comes in – just like the deep breathing we recommended in an earlier article. And along with a little workout, your chuckles also lead to muscle relaxation as the muscles that aren't part of the joke relax. When you are done chortling, your engaged muscles relax. This further leads to a reduction of stress hormones – including four neuroendocrine hormones epinephrine, cortisol, dopamine, and growth hormone.

Plus, clinical studies have shown how humor strengthens your immune system. Published work of Dr. Lee Berk and fellow researcher Dr. Stanley Tan of Loma Linda University in California, document that not only does laughing lower blood pressure, it reduces stress hormones, increases muscle flexion, and boosts immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting T-cells, disease-fighting proteins called Gamma-interferon and B-cells, which produce disease-destroying antibodies.

Lest we forget, laughter as pain, stress or healing therapy is becoming more popular and mainstream as a complimentary medical treatment. For example, laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers which produce a general sense of well-being. In a study published in the Journal of Holistic Nursing, in an effort to distract patients from pain,



caregivers provided humorous one-liners after surgery and before painful medications were administered. Patients exposed to these witticisms perceived less pain when compared to patients who didn't get a dose of humor as part of their medical care. And to help relieve the stress many military families experience, the Pentagon has trained families in laughter techniques to lighten the load. Plus, the benefits of laughing lasts – in one study, healthy antibodies showed an increase in levels well into the next day after a funny video was enjoyed.

Here at Executive MD, we know a doctor visit isn't as much fun as a barrel of monkeys. We also appreciate the fact that laughter has no known side effects and is free – so we're happy to help you determine how to add some fun to your medically conventional treatments. Because we believe that a laugh a day, helps keep sickness away.

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