

# Laugh a Little— It's Good for Your Health

By Rusty Wright

**H**ad a good laugh recently? Need one? Stressful days can invite comic relief. Doctors realise that laughter can enhance physical and mental health. Now it seems even looking forward to laughter can be good for you.

WebMD reports that Lee Berk, MD, a University of California Irvine medical professor, and his associates have for years investigated how moods affect immune systems and illness. They've found laughter has a role in fighting viruses, bacteria, cancer, and heart disease.

Stress can hamper your immune system; a good chuckle can help it. Berk found earlier that watching a one-hour humorous video reduced stress hormone secretion and helped the immune system counter viruses and bacteria.

But there's more: Berk now says the mere anticipation of laughing can help. He studied ten men, measured their stress signs, and told them that in about three days they would see a humorous video. In each man, spirits lifted before viewing the video.

Two days before the viewing, depression was down 51 percent, confusion 36 percent, anger 19 percent, fatigue 15 percent, and tension 9 percent. Right after the viewing, depression and anger were both down 98 percent, fatigue 87 percent, confusion

75 percent, and tension 61 percent.

Berk feels anticipating humour brightens life and affects health. He calls this influence the 'biology of hope'. Berk says: 'Positive anticipation of humour starts

the ball rolling in a sense, in which moods begin to change in ways that help the body fight illness. We believe this shows that even anticipation can be used to help patients recover from a wide range of disorders'.

The moral: planning humour can benefit your health. Watch a funny movie, or spend time with humorous people. Tell your boss, professor, clergy, or club chairperson to liven up their speeches a bit if they want healthy employees, students, or members. Put laugh-breaks on your calendar, since anticipation is part of the therapy.

A Jewish proverb observes: 'A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones'. Paul, a first-century follower of Jesus, emphasised hope: 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope....' Those biblical writers have good advice, practical stuff for everyday life.

The other day, a friend sent what he claimed were comments from civil-service performance evaluations. Maybe because I've encountered a groundswell of administrivia-creating



bureaucrats recently, some of the remarks left me roaring with laughter, and I felt much better. With apologies to the many capable civil servants, do you know anyone like this?

'Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig.'

'I would not allow this employee to breed.'

'This young lady has delusions of adequacy.'

'He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.'

'Got a full six-pack, but lacks the plastic thing to hold it all together.'

Those biblical writers would probably tell me to pray for those who hassle me, advice I should heed. But this laughter-break lifted my spirits and got me going again.

So, laugh more. You'll like it. And say, have you heard the one about...?

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. [www.RustyWright.com](http://www.RustyWright.com)