

Reduce Stress with **Laughter**

We celebrate this month with joy and laughter, while our hearts are filled with love on Valentines Day. Laughter benefits the body, mind and spirit and enhances life. Laughter is a life sustaining energy that adds fun and transforms sadness to happiness. Relationships with others are enhanced with laughter. Better brain function, immune activity, and overall body health improve with laughter.

Laughter is a special type of aerobic activity. Oxygen is moved into the tissues as carbon dioxide is forced out, strengthening the heart and cardiovascular flexibility. Laughter is best experienced daily. Making laughter a special occasion activity can cause the muscles that allow laughter to become less efficient.

Even with less active laughter muscles, the only side effect from too much laughter at one time can be achy ribs and a sore diaphragm. Laughter releases stress and tension and enhances blood and energy flow throughout the body. Laughing regularly strengthens the abdominal muscles, helping keep the body in shape.

Laughter releases one of the most potent and forgotten hormones, oxytocin. Kerstin Umas Moberg, acknowledged as the world authority on oxytocin, details the health benefits of this hormone in his book "The Oxytocin Factor". Oxytocin stimulates feelings of security, satiation and pleasure, and reduces stress.

Some of the other common activities that release this feel good hormone include deep sleep, rocking, singing, interaction with animals, Tai Chi and other related practices, creative types of music, dance, art and literature, play,

and a job or activity well done, especially if it benefits others.

Oxytocin is the main hormone released in childbirth during uterine contractions. It is also released during the acts of nursing, thumb sucking and sex and intimacy. Touch is one of the most powerful stimulants that cause the release of this pleasurable hormone. Different types of touch from rhythmic touch, stroking touch, and pleasant touch that are found in massage, chiropractic and acupuncture also stimulate oxytocin release.

Laughter, smiling and pleasant thoughts all generate oxytocin. Conversely, unpleasant thoughts, worry, anxiety and stress cause the release of stress hormones that stop oxytocin. Specific drugs have been created that will stimulate the release of oxytocin. Instead of taking these anti-depressant drugs to reduce unhappiness and stress, find something to laugh about.

Stress can come from thoughts, just as it can come from physical, environmental, and dietary deficiencies or toxicities. When the body experiences stress specific hormones are produced. These stress hormones cause more stress on the body by creating pain and inflammation. The key to reducing this stress is to repair the damage from past stressors, and help change current stressors so that they do not cause stress.

One solution to handling stress is to change the nature of the thoughts from negative to positive. Forcing a change in thought from the stress of a work deadline to a warm, sunny beach will reduce the negative stress hormones and release the feel good hormone oxytocin. Besides changing a thought, find something to laugh



about so that laughter will envelop and enhance the entire day.

There is hope for those people who cannot easily change their thoughts. Medical researches at The Institute of HeartMath have developed a way to empower people to reduce stress. Their research has identified a measurable physiological state where emotions are calm and the brain, nervous system and other body systems work in harmony. It is this state where



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