

## SERIOUSLY, WE ALL NEED TO LAUGH MORE!

Did you know that within ten minutes of a good belly laugh, incredible health benefits start to kick in? Your blood pressure goes down, your thymus gland enlarges thereby improving your immune system, your breathing deepens, your liver processes adrenaline more easily (the stress hormone), and there is an increase in endorphins (the body's natural pain reliever, and feel good chemicals) pulsing through your body. All of this activity actually promotes healing! Our humour response can be just the antidote to uncomfortable physical reactions to stress, like an upset stomach, rapid and shallow breathing, racing heart or aching head. When you laugh, you give your mind and body a break from the autonomic nervous system stress response. Laughter makes you feel good, and that feeling remains with you even after the laughter subsides.

There are even more examples of the benefits of laughter being studied that support the belief that humour is one of the healthiest and most powerful methods to help ease some symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety. Humour helps people gain perspective about a situation and build resiliency to deal with life's inevitable challenges. There has actually been a great deal of research done on this very topic. Dr. Mintz, Professor at the University of Maryland says, "Humour is one way we cope with living in an imperfect world, with our imperfect selves".

Even though it doesn't always feel like it, we do hold significant power to adapt to the stress in our lives and humour can play a big part in that. Humour provides the perspective and laughter offers the release. The ability to embrace humour fuels how we cope - to heal our hurts, calm our conflicts and build our personal "stress hardiness". With so much potential to heal and renew, the ability to laugh easily and frequently is a tremendous resource for overcoming problems, enhancing relationships and supporting both our physical and emotional health. Shared laughter is one of the most effective tools for keeping relationships strong and lasting with family, friends, and co-workers. Laughter can unite people during difficult times and provide a respite from sadness and pain. Sometimes laughter can support us to have the courage and strength to carry on and find new meaning in our lives after great tragedy.

We know that laughter is contagious – just hearing it primes our brain and readies us to join in. Spend time whenever you can with fun, playful people who laugh easily. Even just smiling helps...it is after all the beginning of laughter. Pioneers in 'laugh therapy' say the benefits of laughter for your mind and body can still happen whether you are responding naturally to something funny, or purposefully choosing to laugh. That explains the increased popularity of 'laughing therapy' approaches.

Wouldn't it be great to make a laughter commitment for ourselves...where we chose to integrate more humour into our lives and thereby enjoy the benefits of a more relaxed, positive, creative, joyful and balanced perspective on life?

*This article was written by Sandra Parkinson, Education Coordinator with Canadian Mental Health Association Grand River Branch, in tribute to the recently celebrated National Mental Health Week theme about the positive role of humour and laughter for our overall health and well-being.*

*The "Open Mind" column is sponsored by individuals and organizations concerned with mental health issues in rural Wellington and Dufferin counties. Contact Canadian Mental Health Association at 519-766-4450 ext. 231 or [parkinsons@cmhagrb.on.ca](mailto:parkinsons@cmhagrb.on.ca). For access to all Open Mind columns and local mental health resources/information, visit [www.cmhagrb.on.ca](http://www.cmhagrb.on.ca) or [www.communitytorchlight.com](http://www.communitytorchlight.com)*