



# Does Laughter Matter? YES!

Laurie McLeod, Artist, Author, Presenter and Entrepreneur

There is a reason why cat videos are so popular – people love to laugh. Laughter is one of the most powerful expressions of human nature. It lifts us up and lightens the air around us. It breaks tension, builds bonds and takes an ordinary day and suddenly makes it shine. A moment of laughter in a roomful of people can lift up that room, twirl it around and land it back down in a whole new place of happiness. As Milton Berle fabulously said: “Laughter is an instant vacation.”

Laughter is, quite simply, one of the best things about being a human being.

And the good news is, it appears we are hard wired for happiness. Scientists have confirmed that in human development, laughter actually predates speech. Which means we were using laughter as a means of communication before we could use language. Infants laugh before they can talk and have shown us that laughter is not under our conscious control.

More often than not, laughter is a social experience – we laugh with others more than we laugh alone. And this fact points to that wonderful thing about laughter – it is contagious. How often have you seen a ripple of laughter move through a group of people that was started simply by one person laughing? It is the best and happiest viral experience there is.

Beyond making us feel good, laughter has powerful health benefits. It lowers blood pressure and increases blood oxygenation. It reduces stress hormones, improves your immune system, relieves pain and can act as a defense against respiratory infections. Expert laugh maker Stephen Colbert believes fully in the body benefits of laughter, stating, "I would say laughter is the best medicine. But more than that, it's an entire regime of antibiotics and steroids."

Psychologically, laughter has been shown to increase memory in learning and to improve alertness and creativity. A big laugh can create an immediate sense of ease, openness and possibility within oneself and between people. A study at John's Hopkins Medical School showed that when humor was used in instruction, students test scores were higher. And lest you think that laughter is a slackers endeavor, the great Andrew Carnegie himself was a believer, stating: "There is little success, where there is little laughter."

The power and importance of laughter to relationships cannot be overstated. Professor Bob Levinson of Berkeley, CA did research with couples, proving that pairs who injected smiling and laughter into their communication reported higher degrees of satisfaction in their relationships and stayed connected longer. No surprise there.

Incredibly, laughter also exists in the animal world. Rats laugh. You can actually tickle a rat and it will laugh. Chimpanzees laugh too when they wrestle and play. And the laughing Kookaburra birds of Australia are well known for their call which sounds just like a laugh. The function is actually territorial but the effect itself is very funny.

While laughter is often a spontaneous affair, it is possible to seek it out. (Cat videos, remember?) Now more than ever, it is possible to create an upbeat mood by a giggle or guffaw. And after you've got your own self going, it is easy to share that joy with others. Comedian Jeff Garlin says, "There's only one true superpower amongst human beings, and that is being funny."

So, make today the day you go after some laughter. Decide to become a not-so-secret agent of joy in your own life and in the lives of others. Start a smile that becomes a grin that becomes a chuckle that becomes more. Then invite your friends and co-workers to share your experience so everyone can revel in the ringing happiness of it all. Need help getting started?

[Click here](#) for two minutes of total joy. And then keep laughing!

