



Psychosocial Support Series Laughter Wellness

FIGHT. THRIVE. SURVIVE.



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Message from



Yang Berhormat Dr Lee Boon Chye
Deputy Minister of Health, Malaysia.

An important aspect of survivorship is emotional and mental wellbeing. Laughter has great potential in relieving stress and can be carried out by anyone anywhere. We encourage everyone to laugh more!

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Laughter:

- sends out positive emotions
- expresses joy
- indicates positive feedback¹
- is a form of therapy to moderate the effects of negative emotions, such as stress and depression²

The physiological effects of laughter

Laughter is not merely an emotion – it can heal mind and the body.

Laugh for Wellness

Laughing is an aerobic exercise. It involves taking in a great amount of oxygen and, at the same time, flushing carbon dioxide from the body. Through laughing, our lungs expand,³ increasing the supply of oxygen to the brain.

Research has also shown that laughter increases blood circulation as it controls the constriction of blood vessels⁴. It increases the heart's ability to pump blood, transporting more oxygen through the body.



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1. Scott S, Lavan N, Chen S, McGettigan C. The social life of laughter. Trends Cogn Sci. 2014 Dec;18(12):618–20.
 2. Mora-Ripoll R. The therapeutic value of laughter in medicine. Altern Ther Health Med. 2010 Dec;16(6):56–64.
 3. Dolgoff-Kaspar R, Baldwin A, Johnson MS, Edling N, Sethi GK. Effect of laughter yoga on mood and heart rate variability in patients awaiting organ transplantation: A pilot study. Altern. Ther. Health Med. 2012;18:61-6
 4. Hasan H, Hasan TF. Laugh yourself into a healthier person: A cross cultural analysis of the effects of varying levels of laughter on health. Int. J. Med. Sci. 2009; 6:200-11

Laugh for Happiness

After studying the subject of humour for over 40 years, Dr William Fry found that laughing produces natural painkillers such as endorphins ('feel good' hormones) in the body⁵. This increases our tolerance against pain and stressor⁶, such as those that result from cancer treatment.

Laughter can also an anti-depressant: it releases serotonin and dopamine, which 'calms' the brain⁷. Even forced laughter can release these hormones, help regulate moods and suppress the development of depression.

Laugh for Health

People with a weakened immune system, such as those going through treatment, are prone to infections. Professor Lee Berk of Loma Linda University found that laughter activates natural 'killer' cells and increases the immunoglobulin (immunity) levels by 3-fold. This further increases the number of T-lymphocytes (a type of white blood cell) and antibodies in the body's immune system⁸. These cells are responsible in boosting the immunity of the individual.



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5. Fry WF, Salameh WA. Handbook of humor and psychotherapy: Advances in the clinical use of humor. Florida: Professional Resource Exchange Inc, 1987. 57 p.
 6. Yim J. Therapeutic benefits of laughter in mental health: A theoretical review. Tohoku J Exp Med. 2016;239(3):243–9
 7. Kataria M. Laughter Yoga: Daily laughter practices for health and happiness. Penguin Random House India Private Limited; 2018. 239 p.
 8. Bennett MP, Lengacher C. (2009) Humor and laughter may influence health IV. humor and immune function. Evid. Based Complement. Alternat. Med. 2009;6:159-64

What is Laughter Wellness?

Laughter wellness is a combination of unconditional laughter and yoga breathing exercises (Pranayama). In this therapeutic exercise, everyone laughs without relying on any form of jokes or humour⁹.

It is postulated that regardless of fake or genuine laughter, our body produces similar “happy chemicals” in the body¹⁰. This means that even forced laughter can evoke a positive mood or improve a bad mood.

Laughter Wellness uses a non-pharmacological approach to improve one’s mental health⁶. In addition, it can be done almost anywhere at any time.



9. Bressington D, Yu C, Wong W, Ng TC, Chien WT. The effects of group-based Laughter Yoga interventions on mental health in adults: A systematic review. *J Psychiatr Ment Health Nurs*. 2018 Oct;25(8):517–27.

10. Louie D, Brook K, Frates E. The laughter prescription. *Am J Lifestyle Med*. 2016 Jun 23;10(4):262–7.

Origins of Laughter Wellness⁷

Laughter Wellness was established based on the foundation of Laughter Wellness which was founded by 'The Laughter Guru' Dr Madan Kataria, an Indian physician. In 1995, Dr Kataria struggled with depression and constantly relied on medication for relief. When he tried laughter as a therapeutic approach later on, he discovered that he could get two hours of undisturbed sleep by having 30 minutes of laughter alone.

He went on to establish his first laughter club with just five people. Despite initial setbacks, he continued to advocate for the health benefits of laughter, and eventually people started to realise its benefits. Within two decades, more than 1600 laughter wellness clubs were established worldwide. Laughter Wellness is now an established form of therapy to improve mental health.



Dr Madan Kataria



World Laughter Day was created in 1998 by Dr Madan Kataria. The annual celebration held on every first Sunday of May is to promote world peace through laughter and raise awareness about its benefits. On this day, laughter club members all over the world gather around to laugh together and spread out the positivity of love, kindness, and compassion.

Role of laughter wellness in cancer management

Depression, anxiety, stress and poor self-care are among some of the side effects of cancer. All this conditions may affect the efficacy of chemotherapy and quality of life¹¹. Laughter Wellness can be a healthy way to improve mental health as scientific studies have revealed significant effects of laughter on cancer patients.

Results show a decrease in anxiety, stress and depression, as well as an increase in the quality of life and resilience of cancer patients and survivors. Mixed results were observed for reduction of depression. There is, of course, a need for further studies for more conclusive evidence.

Year	Subjects	Methods	Result
2011	40 breast cancer patients	One-hour laughter therapy including dance, laughter techniques and meditation	Significantly improved mood by 65% and reported a 21% decrease of state-anxiety among breast cancer patients ⁹
2011	37 breast cancer survivors	Twice a week for 60 minutes of laughter therapy, eight sessions in total	Effective in increasing the quality of life by 21% and 7% in terms of patients/ resilience ¹⁰
2014	37 cancer sufferers	Laughter wellness for 20 to 30 minutes	Significant of reduction stress level before chemotherapy by 31% ¹¹
2014	60 breast cancer patients	Four sessions of therapeutic laughter program	Significant reduction of stress (50%), anxiety (36%), depression (49%) after first session ¹²

11. Pitman A, Suleman S, Hyde N, Hodgkiss A. Depression and anxiety in patients with cancer. BMJ. 2018 Apr 25;361:k1415. Han HJ, Park A, Kim HS, Moon H, Park YH. The effects of laughter therapy on stress responses in patients with preoperative breast cancer. J Korean Oncol Nurs [Internet]. 2011 Aug [cited 2019 Mar 8];11(2):93-100. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.5388/jkon.2011.11.2.93>

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Laughter Exercises

Laughter wellness is an activity that can be carried out in groups with a facilitator or even at home by yourself. In the group sessions, the exercises in Laughter Wellness are found to promote greater physical health as well as social bonding. Under the guidance of a facilitator, participants are ensured of 30 minutes of laughter. Some of the participants in our Laughter Wellness classes said they were able to leave negativity aside, be a child again and laugh it all out.

But for those who are unable to join a class, here are some exercises an individual can do at home by themselves, or even together with a group of your friends or family.

Before you start



- 1 Check with your doctor that you are well enough to start these exercises.
- 2 The moment you feel uncomfortable or pain, stop the exercise immediately.
- 3 Make sure you stay hydrated after laughter exercises – drink more water!
- 4 Take it easy

NCSM's Laughter Wellness

NCSM has a Laughter Wellness class that is carried out by a trainer every Monday. Sessions are free for survivors and caregivers.

Visit us if you are keen to start a class in your neighbourhood.

For more details, visit cancer.org.my or call us at 03-2698 7300.

Warm up

- 1 Stretch your muscles and take deep breaths.
- 2 Clap your hands: use the rhythm of 1-2, 1-2-3 while saying 'ho ho', 'ha ha ha'
- 3 Do the 'lion laughter exercise': Open your mouth wide and stick your tongue out. Stretch your arms out, and laugh from your belly.



Exercise 1

30-second laughter: for 30 seconds, laugh without stopping for while shrugging your shoulders on and off.

Exercise 2

Happy memories chuckle: locate a happy memory, when you last laughed with your loved ones. Connect with this memory and laugh like you did then.

Exercise 3

Start with a smile, and slowly transition into a giggle, then to a full laughter. Increase your volume throughout the exercise.

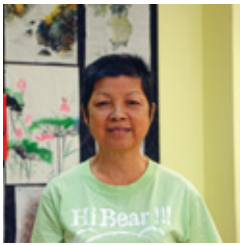


Testimonials Laughter Wellness Participants



Bella,
Breast cancer survivor

"Laughter Wellness made me feel energised through aerobic exercises and laughing. Whenever I'm here, I feel relaxed and my thoughts are away from negativity, and that is very important for people going through cancer."



Annie,
Lung cancer survivor

"When I got cancer, I felt lonely. However, being together with these people in Laughter Wellness, I felt like they are my family and now they are my new sisters that support me. I am never alone anymore."



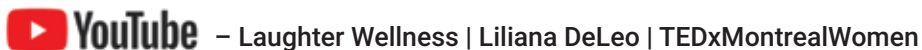
Dr Madan Kataria,
Founder of Laughter Wellness

"I have not seen anybody dying of laughter; I know millions who are dying because they are not laughing."

Further resources



Created by the founder of Laughter Wellness, Dr Madan Kataria, the channel shares knowledge on Laughter Wellness as well as testimonies of individuals who have been practicing Laughter Wellness worldwide. The channel also contains various exercises for Laughter Wellness, allowing individuals to practice laughing anytime and anywhere.



A TEDx Talk presented by a certified Laughter Wellness Teacher, Liliana De Leo. She talks about how Laughter Wellness provided her a platform to interact with other people, and how it inspired her to become a laughter teacher.



– Laughter Yoga
(<https://www.facebook.com/laughteryoga>)



– Dr Madan Kataria
(<https://twitter.com/kataria1955>)

You can interact with Dr Madan Kataria and his team through his social media accounts. You can also view laughter-related posts and explore how laughter clubs around the world celebrate laughter through Laughter Wellness.



– www.laughteryoga.org

Interested in Laughter Wellness? Check out the website that contains articles written by Dr Kataria himself as well as other resources for further reading.



Giving Hope Celebrating Life

Authors



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An enthusiastic and determined student in pursuing his dream to be a cancer counsellor. He is devoted to improve mental health of people suffering from cancer, thus living by the quote: "The finest medicine is found in a positive mind and a healthy soul."



Chew Wan Ling
B.Sc (Hons) Nutrition with Wellness , UCSI University

Wan Ling believes that no matter what people experience in life, it's a learning process that helps us to grow stronger. Appreciate the little things in life, no matter good or bad. Be grateful!



Lee Xin Yun
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Simplicity makes Xin Yun happy. To her, happiness is a choice. There is going to be stress in life no matter what, but it is also a matter of choice whether people want to be happy or not.



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