



# Laughter is the best medicine

NEEDLESS TO SAY CANCER TREATMENT IS TRAUMATIC FOR THE PATIENT AND THEIR LOVED ONES. SO, IT MAY BE OUTLANDISH TO TELL THEM TO LAUGH THROUGH IT, BUT LAUGHING CAN HELP.

## Laughter therapy

Doctors in America have begun to include laughter therapy to compliment traditional treatments for cancer. Many hospitals around the world are now embedding ways to promote laughter in their treatment regime. Patient visits to a hospital area where laughter therapy is conducted is promoted, while laughter clubs are found outside of medical facilities too.

## Benefits of laughing

A good belly laugh comes packed with numerous benefits. It makes us happy, offers a welcome distraction, it's fun and soothing, especially for those with immense stress and worry.

Since science is the demand of the paradigm, it becomes necessary to mention that rigorous scientific research on laughter has highlighted the innumerable benefits laughter has for our overall well-being: physiological, psychological, as well as social.

Laughter releases endorphins, which are the feel-good chemicals in the brain that reduce pain and boost mood. The less stressed people are, the better their immune system is at fighting illness.

Laughing also supplies oxygen to the brain, which enhances creativity and increases blood flow.

Chemotherapy, radiation and the after effects can produce pain, both emotional and physical. Bouts of giggles can help ease this pain.

## Physiological benefits of laughter

- Helps to maintain a healthy heart. Many cancer patients get hypertension during and post treatment due to the excessive stress.
- Relaxes the whole body and relieves excessive muscle tension.
- It is a whole body workout – abdomen, shoulders, legs, facial muscles, etc.
- Helps to maintain optimum level of fitness and resilience for the course of treatment and post treatment too.
- Enhances the immune system and can lead to better response to medication and makes the patient less vulnerable to catching additional infections.
- Sustains recovery and enriches quality of life post treatment.

## Mindful activity

Laughter therapy is a mindful activity. When you laugh, it puts you in the present moment. It's a stress buster and allows you to take a break (from cancer) and have a little fun.

During laughter therapy, we (laughter therapy teacher and patient) do childlike, playful exercises together, combined with breathing exercises. The practice also can be adapted whether you're in bed, or in a wheelchair hooked up to a IV drip.

## Example of exercise: cell phone laughter

You hold an imaginary cell phone and laugh aloud, while making different gestures and moving around in the room. This is a good exercise for lonely people or people that just want to get rid of stress while they laugh with an imagery friend.

## Voluntary

Part of laughter therapy's power lies in its voluntary nature. Patients and caregivers are invited to laugh, not forced into it. It will allow you, the patient, to look at life in a new perspective, and gives you permission to take what could be a humiliating experience and turn it into something funny.

It's also a mind-body exercise and is an important tool in the journey back to normalcy. When we find ways to lighten up and have fun, it can be very contagious. Just the act of laughing on purpose, can lead to genuine laughter.



## MEET OUR EXPERT

Heinrich Visser is a certified laughter therapy teacher and corporate laughter coach. He has studied with Dr Madan Kataria, founder of the Laughter Yoga Movement in Bangalore, India for his teachers certification.