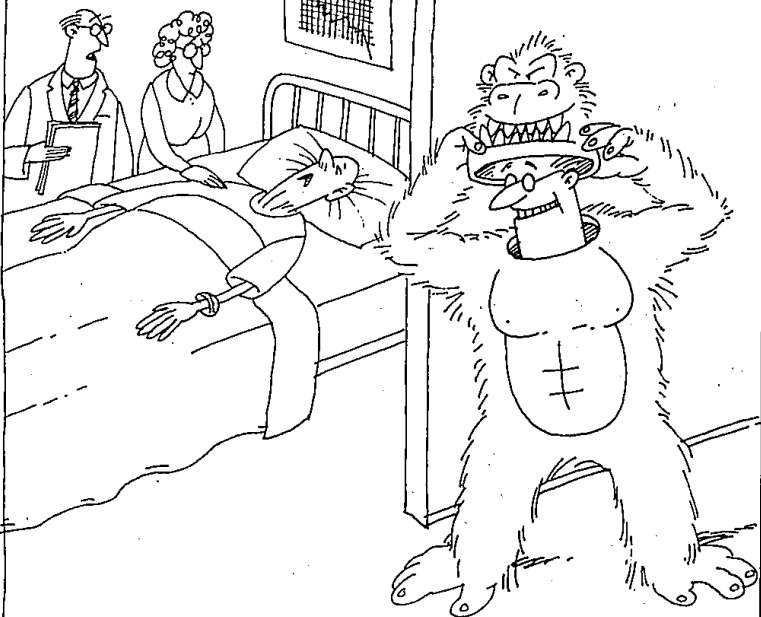


# Science

# LAUGHING

# until it doesn't hurt!

ANY UNEXPECTED  
EXCITEMENT COULD  
FINISH HIM OFF,  
I'M AFRAID.



BARNEY JUDGE 1987 ©

## Prescription: mirth

By Sharon Dargay  
staff writer

More doctors are writing the prescription of laughter for their patients these days.

And even though juggling cubes and joke books haven't replaced tablets and injections, "peeing" is taking on a whole new meaning in the hospital setting. Ribbing has become more than just a part of the skeletal system, and "pill" often refers to a patient's demeanor.

Health care workers are discovering that laughter is one of the best medicines.

"One way to help prevent illness and to recuperate is to see the humorous side of things," said Susan Hicks, president of the Michigan Society of Hospital Social Work Directors and an employee at Crittenton Hospital in Rochester.

"As far as I know, there's no formal program for treatment with humor," added Joanne Langille, spokeswoman at the University of Michigan Hospital, Ann Arbor. "But humor does abound in a hospital setting, although some might characterize it as black humor."

Social workers, nurses, psychologists and even an increasing number of physicians are likely to use humor as an informal, almost adjunct part

of treatment, said Gail Hoffman, spokeswoman for the psychiatry department at University of Michigan Hospital.

"I think people have always known about the benefits of humor. Most people who interact here with [patients] are doing some of that," Hoffman explained. "We tend to do it among ourselves on staff and impart it [to patients]."

STEVE ALLEN, a family practitioner and son of comedian Steve Allen, last week told University Hospital staff how to reduce stress by mixing laughter and medicine. Allen prescribes juggling and compliments to alleviate stress and prevent illness.

Alison Crane, a registered nurse, has used humor in her work as a consultant in Chicago to help reduce physical pain among patients. Crane also promotes laughter as a means of decreasing hostility, building communication and reducing the patient's feelings of inferiority toward physicians.

In his book, "Anatomy of an Illness," Norman Cousins described his recuperation from a debilitating illness through the use of humorous films and vitamin therapy.

"Norman Cousins isn't a physician but he is an adjunct professor at

UCLA, and his work has been very important," said Ted Braude, Royal Oak counselor and teacher at Oakland County Community College.

"It's not a new area. There's an ancient tradition between humor and health," Braude said, adding that the topic generally isn't included in medical school curriculum. But Braude has spoken to social work students at Wayne State University.

"MOST PEOPLE can accept the intrinsic value of laughter, but as we see more scientific evidence about its benefits, the more likely it will be accepted by society," added Dan Tomaszewski, director of education for the Rehabilitation Institute, Detroit. "The benefits aren't just psychological but also physical, because laughter and play can be measured biochemically."

"For the most part, medicine has ignored the psychosocial dimension of health care. The overwhelming emphasis is toward the biochemical evidence of health. Nursing, social work and psychiatry have been more creative in their use of humor."

Braude and Tomaszewski have organized programs dealing with humor and health. Along with teaching class on the subject, Braude uses the concept in private therapy.

Tomaszewski oversees the "Light

Laughter. 300 mp. chuckles. Take twice daily. Refillable. Contraindications: None. May cause mirth if taken for an extended period. Continued use may cause feelings of euphoria, physical well-being, happiness. In case of accidental overdose—whoopee!

Brigade," an informal group of Rehabilitation Institute employees who respond to "Code Dulls," with funny posters, movies and non-competitive play.

The Institute sponsors a one-day "Staff Laff" each year to experience the therapeutic value of laughter. A humor first aid kit keeps staff and patients supplied with jokes and cartoons.

"As hospital employees we're under a great deal of stress. We try to promote an atmosphere in which people feel it's OK to laugh," Tomaszewski explained.

But he and Braude also admitted that health care workers should use care in dispensing humor to their patients. Humor may not be appropriate in all circumstances.

"Attacking with wit and sarcasm will draw out defensiveness and anger. I don't see that as being healing. It just perpetuates the wounds and makes them worse," Braude said.

"Flush out and let the naked absurdities bring out the humor of a situation."

By Sharon Dargay  
staff writer

It's as contagious as the chicken pox and as analgesic as aspirin.

It dribbles out slowly in the form of suppressed giggles. Or gushes uncontrollably as a flood of guffaws.

It happens spontaneously or becomes as practiced as a daily injection of insulin.

"Part of the magic of laughter — the physiological magic, is that you don't have to be convinced about it because your body doesn't care whether you're convinced that you are really laughing," said Ted Braude, a Royal Oak instructor at Oakland County Community College's southeast campus who teaches classes in "Humor and Health."

"If you laugh and practice it, you'll get an immediate sense of well-being because you get hormones released when you laugh. It's that simple. It works. Just do it. You don't have to believe it."

And you don't need a pie in the face to trigger a few good belly laughs, either.

"I can laugh on command. I can be in the most somber mood, and if I decide to laugh, I'll laugh. The yogic exercise is one way of helping develop your ability to laugh. Even if you laugh now, it will enhance your laugh."

"But it happens through doing, not just thinking about it."

The yogic arch is a bony arch on either side of the face just below the eye.

THE ZYGOMATIC exercise divides the physical act of laughing into a series of seven steps, which Braude suggests be practiced in front of a mirror no matter how "silly and embarrassing."

"Do it while you're on the phone. Work at your own pace. Start a buddy system with someone."

Try it right now. You can hide behind the newspaper if you feel shy. Sit down if you're standing.

Ready? Slightly curl the sides of your lips. That stretches the zygomatic muscles and tells the brain, "We're going

to have a good time now."

For the second and third steps, squint your eyes, raise your eyebrows and wrinkle and contract your forehead.

Feeling silly? Good. Now drop your neck and lower lip.

Hold it right there. Sneak a peek in the mirror. (That's not a part of the exercise, but it can't hurt.)

Now comes the "laugh" part of the process. Hold your hand over your stomach, expel air from your lungs and make a HA HA HA sound.

Continue to laugh — even if it sounds stilted — and begin slapping your knee or rocking in rhythm.

THE COMBINATION should start a ripple of "real" laughter and may lead to crying, the seventh step in the process.

"The more you do it, the stronger your ability will be to laugh. Your view of the world will change. If you practice this, it will enhance your ability to see and experience humorous things."

Why does laughter make you feel good?

It's a little like jogging, in that it exercises the heart. But unlike aerobic exercise, it doesn't wear out your tennis shoes. And it relaxes, rather than exhausts.

"The heart is a muscle and, like other muscles, needs exercise," Braude explained. "It beats faster and makes the blood circulation increase."

Other physical consequences of laughter include:

• Increased breathing. "Getting more air into your system is a good thing. Lungs get more of a workout. It's like aerobics."

• Increased blood pressure which then drops below where it started before laughter began. "The net result is blood pressure goes down which is a relaxing effect."

• Body temperature rises. "You get that good feeling of being warmed up inside."

• Catecholamines, including endorphins, (hormones) are released. "When they're released you have a sense of alertness, light euphoria and a sense of well-being."

## Giggle while you work

By Sharon Dargay  
staff writer

The boss paced, red-faced and nervous while the clock ticked away toward deadline like a time bomb.

A few employees crouched under desks with fingers stuck in their ears, grimacing in anticipation of another verbal explosion. One fainted from the tension. One lapsed into instant depression.

Another calmly retrieved the revolver hidden in her desk, took careful aim at her colleagues and squeezed the trigger.

SQUINT

The scenario is imaginary. But the technique, dousing the fury with a water gun, could help bring levity back into a stressful work situation — just as a cartoon on the employee bulletin board turns frowns upside down. Or a funny memo can mend a misunderstanding.

"If work is oppressive, do some things on the sly that will break other people up," suggests Ted Braude, Oakland Community College teacher. "Is everybody uptight at work? It's not an original idea, but what you need is a rubber fish. When no one's around, drop it in the water cooler and then step back and watch people's reactions."

"In situations that are oppressive, cultivate a humorous attitude about the situation. It doesn't necessarily

*'If work is oppressive, do some things on the sly that will break other people up.'*

— Ted Braude,  
OCC teacher

change the oppression but it does change what you allow to happen to yourself."

A COMEDY journal can help cultivate a sense of humor, suggests Dave Tomaszewski, director of education for the Rehabilitation Institute in Detroit.

"Keep a book of what you find funny. Take notes. We do that to learn other things. Why not for laughter?" Tomaszewski asked.

"Learn a style of humor you're comfortable with. Watch your favorite comedian."

Keep a library of comedy books on hand. Start staff meetings with a short, humorous film. Encourage employees and colleagues to post humorous posters or appropriate jokes.

Non-competitive games, played on a lunch hour at work or with family members at home, also relieve tension and encourage unity.

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