

# Got Laughter?

Breathe, chuckle, giggle and laugh away stress.

by Roni Tagliaferri CLYL

"Find the funny in life," is the *mantra* for laughter yoga; a *mantra* participants carry with them between laughter yoga sessions. Examples of this abound; I heard one participant note that between laughter sessions, he laughs at things that used to anger or annoy him, applying the *mantra* off the mat.

The funny is always in front of us, we just have to remind ourselves to look for it. We can practice: laughing for no reason on a regular basis can create a more positive attitude; and can even improve a person's sense of humor.

The contemporary, popular practice of *hasya* (Sanskrit word for laughter) yoga began in 1995, initiated by Dr. Madan Kataria, a physician from India. In his medical practice he noticed a difference between the patients who laughed easily and often, and those who laughed very little: the ones that laughed often had fewer infections and healed more quickly than the ones who rarely laughed. This is similar to the popular writings of Norman Cousins, who claimed training himself to laugh improved his health; or the clowning around of Dr. Patch Adams.

Dr. Kataria published a paper titled, "Laughter: the Best Medicine" and wrote a book, *Laugh for No Reason*. To help his patients have more laughter in their lives, he popularized the concept of laughter yoga, and started the first in a larger movement of laughter clubs where people unite to practice raucous glee.

*Hasya* yoga shares similarities with other yogic practices, although the mat is not included or required. *Pranayama*, yogic breath-

ing techniques, are combined with playful laughter exercises. A willingness to laugh is the only prerequisite; jokes, a reason to laugh, a feeling of happiness or even a sense of humor are not required to participate in *hasya* yoga. It's a physical exercise, not a mental one.

In laughter yoga, we begin to place our bodies through the physical motions of laughter and happiness, and the emotions naturally follow. Our bodies are unable to tell the difference between spontaneous laughter and physically-induced laughter. When the body sends the message to the brain that we're happy, because we're laughing, the brain creates the physiological and psychological benefits of genuine laughter.

## Too Old to Laugh?

Adults laugh only 10 to 20 times a day. Young children, on the other hand, can laugh 300 to 400 times a day. Kids laugh for no reason, just for the joy of being alive. Adults still have this internal fountain of joy, it's merely buried. A session of laughter yoga is an opportunity to reconnect with our innate childlike joy.

One of the benefits of laughter is that it relieves depression and anxiety. People's loved ones note changes in a person's voice after *hasya* yoga; depression lifts even after only one session. Laughter yoga has even been featured on *Oprah*; her makeup artist, Reggie, attended a class. He reported entering the session feeling depressed, but post-laughter, his feelings of depression were gone and the happiness lingered on for days.

## The Laughter's High

Research has shown that laughter produces

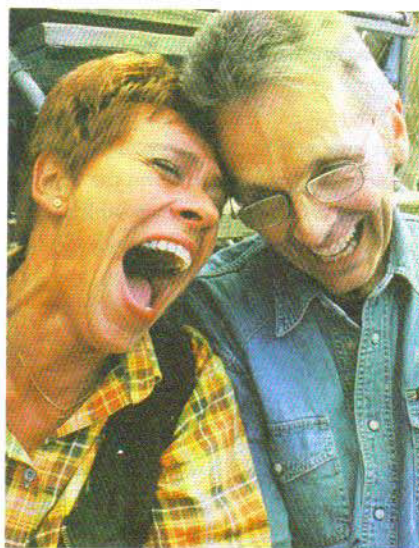


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American School of Laughter Yoga

the same endorphins (neurotransmitters associated with happiness) that runners experience during a "runner's high." This

endorphin surge is a natural painkiller. Serotonin, another neurotransmitter associated with happiness, increases when we laugh. Laughter enhances immune system function as a result of these feel-good molecules proliferating. Physically, a good guffaw massages the internal organs and improves the digestive processes. Laughing provides a burst of energy, expands lung capacity, stimulates internal heat and improves overall oxygenation.

## Let the Giggle In

Good for body, mind and spirit, laughing with others is a great way to build bridges and promote peace, one person at a time, first in the community and eventually in the world.

LAYOGA

*Laughter clubs are fully independent, not-for-profit, community based groups that meet on a regular basis; there are more than 300 in the U.S. alone. They are non-religious, non-political, and non-competitive. [laughteryoga.org](http://laughteryoga.org)*

*Join celebrity Yogi Ramesh and other happy yogis for the West Coast Laughter Yoga annual conference, October 26 - 28 in Sierra Madre. [Laughteryoga.us](http://Laughteryoga.us)*

*Roni Tagliaferri is a Certified Laughter Yoga Leader who facilitates a free laughter yoga class Saturday mornings: 7:30 - 8:15 A.M. at Camarillo Yoga Center. [RoniRadio.com](http://RoniRadio.com); [CamarilloYoga.com](http://CamarilloYoga.com)*