

# LAUGHTER THERAPY | HIYASA YOGA

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Life- Don't take it seriously. Seriousness is a disease of the ego. It is one of the root causes of disease in the human body. Seriousness is stress, rigidity, depression, negativity, lowers the immune system, encourages separateness from others and upholds dogma. If you block yourself access to the child within because you're too serious, you block your connection to the divine light and your feminine self. Every creator who's any good, uses their feminine side to create with, whether a scientist working on a hunch, a painter working with the interplay of colors, or a musician dealing with the juxtaposition of notes and chords. Enter Humor, lightening up and Laughter, the best combater of stress and seriousness. Humor your stress. When

we lighten up it changes the energy. When doing exercises designed to get people to laugh for no reason combined with simple yoga breathing techniques and laughter meditation it will relieve stress, boosts immunity, fights depression and eventually make people into more positive thinkers. Laughter in and of itself breeds connection with others and enables us to see a joy in all things. Laughter creates chemical changes in the body and produces serotonin and pain blockers.

So, come, laugh with me -Start with a smile. When you open your eyes in the morning or whenever your rest is, put a smile on your face first thing, before any negativity comes flowing into your mind. Right there, the weight of the world starts to lighten. Then get a little tickle in you belly and vibrate it bigger and bigger. Feel the stress flowing out of your body and the endorphins kicking in. The brick wall of your mind crumbles and falls with each guffaw. Tension in your muscles melt away with each jiggle of your giggle. Let the laughter take its course relaxing and invigorating at the same time.

Hasya (Sanskrit for Laughter) Yoga.

<http://laughteryoga.org>

This laughter practice was founded by Dr. Madan Kataria who's very first Laughter Club started in 1995 in Mumbai, India.

The practice moves progressively from the ho ho, ha ha exercise to other types of simulated laughter; hearty laughter, greeting laughter, open-mouthed silent laughter, humming laughter, lion laughter (an adaptation of Lion Pose), and swinging laughter, with arm movement. Each laughter is sustained for up to 45 seconds and followed with deep breathing and stretching exercises.

The laughter exercises are designed to be done together, with participants progressing from one type of chuckle to another in the company of others. Laughter in laughter clubs is the purest laughter because it is not for any reason. It is not directed at others but learning to laugh at ourselves.

Life can be a challenge and It helps if you're able to laugh. The benefits are positively life-enhancing. Not only does laughter help you to lose your inhibitions and gain self-confidence, but by embracing the spirit of laughter, it's possible to achieve a more positive outlook on life, as well as improved lung capacity and abdominal tone.

The use of abdominal muscles during the practice of forced laughter is likened to yoga exercises which tone the digestive system, emphasizing that strong abdominal muscles contribute to a healthy digestive system. Laughter practice raises both pulse rate and blood pressure, stimulating and toning the circulatory system, and strengthens the respiratory system by utilizing the entire capacity of the lungs. *Prana*—or life force—gains entry to our bodies via breathing, so clear respiratory passages and strong lungs are essential to the well-being of both body and spirit.

The idea that laughter has beneficial effects is not new. Norman Cousins, editor of the *Saturday Review*, documented his own laughter cure in the 1979 book *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*. Cousins had been diagnosed in the mid-1960s with ankylosing spondylitis, a painful degenerative disease of the connective tissue that left him weak and barely able to move. Doctors gave him a 500-to-1 chance of recovery. But instead of undergoing conventional treatments, Cousins checked out of the hospital and into a hotel, where he set up a film projector and played funny movies. He took massive doses of vitamin C and submitted himself to hours of the Marx Brothers. "I made the joyous discovery that 10 minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect," he wrote, "and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep."

Cousins recovered and lived for another 26 years. And, in part inspired by his experience, a handful of scientists began researching the healing power of laughter.

One of them was William Fry, then a psychiatrist at Stanford University. In a career that spanned more than 50 years, Fry documented some of the health benefits of what he calls "mirthful laughter." In a series of studies, Fry and his colleagues found that laughter increases circulation, stimulates the immune system, exercises the muscles,

and even invigorates the brain. Other researchers have found that laughter reduces stress hormones and may even help prevent heart disease.

But can fake laughter—laughter devoid of humor, laughter that's forced rather than spontaneous—have the same beneficial effects? Fry believes that aside from the mental stimulation that comes in the moment of discovery when you hear a good joke or appreciate a pun, the effects should be largely the same. "I think it's definitely beneficial," says Fry, who has heard about but hasn't experienced Laughter Yoga. "I'm very much in favor of this program."

So, dust off your sense of humor, take a deep breath, and Laugh. Long, loud, and clear.

**(Included on the audio file are laughter exercises using vowels.)**

# 6 Laughter Yoga Exercises to Try



RICK CUMMINGS

## 1. Greeting laughter

Walk around to different people with palms pressed together at the upper chest in the Namaste greeting or shake hands and laugh, making sure to look into other people's eyes.

## 2. Lion laughter

Thrust out the tongue, widen the eyes, and stretch the hands out like claws while laughing.

## 3. Humming laughter

Laugh with the mouth closed and hum.

#### **4. Silent laughter**

Open your mouth wide and laugh without making a sound. Look into other people's eyes and make funny gestures.

#### **5. Gradient laughter**

Start by smiling and then slowly begin to laugh with a gentle chuckle. Increase the intensity of the laugh until you've achieved a hearty laugh. Then gradually bring the laugh down to a smile again.

#### **6. Heart-to-heart laughter**

Move close to a person and hold each other's hands and laugh. If people feel comfortable, they can stroke or hug each other.

