

tle relief. He counsels others to create a humor library with books, films and audio cassettes to turn to for a distraction. But the humor is not to mask the pain. He advises others to face it, feel it, gain a new perspective on it – that, he says, is the best way to get control.

"I think it's more of a mindset," agrees Kim Sammons, director of public relations for the Arthritis Foundation in Atlanta. "There are a lot of people who say you can let it ruin your life. But instead of that you can use humor."

Jacobson says there is a definite physical connection between his

# Laughing at pain

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mind and body, that how he perceives the pain truly affects how the pain feels to him. If he can keep smiling, he can keep the pain at bay.

"When you crack up hard for two minutes, your body is free of pain for two hours," says Jacobson. □

Give Jacobson something to laugh about – e-mail your jokes to him at: [djacob@flash.net](mailto:djacob@flash.net). He also has a Web page devoted to arthritis and using humor to cope with it: [www.flash.net/~djacob/home.html](http://www.flash.net/~djacob/home.html).

For more information about arthritis or to find help in your area contact the Arthritis Foundation at (800) 283-7800 or on the Web at [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org).

## 8 WAYS HUMOR HEALS

It's unanimous. Medical experts agree with David Jacobson that cosmic humor – such as chuckling about the punches that life often throws us – is the kind that connects us and heals us. "Humor and laughter are infectious – and both are good for your health," says laughter expert William F. Fry Jr., MD, associate professor emeritus of Stanford University. Here are eight reasons why a simple dose of laughter may be just what you need.

**1 BEATS ANXIETY:** Ever notice how uptight the spouses are in the TV sitcom *Mad About You*? But by humoring each other, they lighten up and save their marriage. "Humorous thoughts and mirthful laughter work wonders by initially arousing and distracting the mind and then leaving us feeling more relaxed," explains Harold H. Bloomfield, MD, in his book *Healing Anxiety with Herbs* (HarperCollins, 1998, \$23).

**2 RESOLVES CONFLICT:** Evidence shows that laughter can also help defuse tension between nations, improve relationships with co-workers and aid in teaching. How? "You can illustrate points through humor and get points across," says Fry. "Each moment of humor represents a moment of discovery."

**3 LESSENS STRESS:** Let's face it, people who have a good sense of humor can chill out and enjoy better health. In fact, laughter is a super way to release pent-up anger, which has been linked to heart disease.

"A few minutes of laughing lowers stress hormones and raises the number of circulating antibodies that fight off disease for almost 36 hours," says Paul Pearsall, PhD, in his book *The Pleasure Prescription* (Hunter House, 1996, \$23.95).

**4 BOOSTS THE IMMUNE SYSTEM:** "There is now evidence that a good sense of humor is associated with enhanced immune efficiency and that mothers who laughed and expressed their sense of humor during pregnancy had fewer illnesses and their babies had fewer infections," reports Pearsall.

Also, research at the State University of New York has shown a link between laughter and raised levels of immune-system components such as immunoglobulin A. These disease-fighters help guard against illness by marking out invading bacteria and viruses for later destruction by white blood cells.

**5 CLEARS UP BREATHING PROBLEMS:** Breathing easy

may be as easy as a free prescription of chuckles. According to the United Health Care Corporation in Minneapolis, laughter can help people with breathing problems such as emphysema because the change in your breathing pattern when you laugh aids ventilation and clears mucus.

**6 BUFFERS FEAR, REDUCES PAIN:** Remember the TV sitcom *M\*A\*S\*H*? Fun-loving characters mustered up humor to cope during a frightening and sometimes very painful war. In real life laughter can help people cope, whether it be during a birth or even a death. Just ask Fry. He recalls a very poignant letter from a veteran who survived the D-Day invasion. On the cross-channel trip one soldier made a joke and everybody broke up. They temporarily forgot what they were about to do.

And yes, fear is often coupled with pain. But don't despair. Scientists believe laughter may trigger the production of the brain's endorphins – our body's natural painkillers.

**7 PROVIDES AEROBIC BENEFITS:** Sound silly? It's not, according to experts. Research conducted by Fry shows that 10 seconds of a good belly laugh is as good for your heart as exercising for three minutes on a rowing machine. Evidently, laughter can rev up your heart rate, circulation and brain activity, which can burn calories.

**8 CONTRIBUTES A SENSE OF WELL-BEING:** Many of the subjects in the Superyoung Project, based on 18 years of scientific research, ranked humor high on their list of things that contributed toward a sense of well-being.

"It's a way for people to make light of their foibles and frailties," reports co-authors Dr. David Weeks and Jamie James in their book *Secrets of the Superyoung* (Villard, 1998, \$23.95) – an ability that becomes increasingly valuable in later life."

**BONUS TIP:** Tickle your funny bone. Share jokes with friends, watch *Seinfeld* reruns, rent a vintage Buster Keaton movie, tune into Leno or Letterman, adopt a kid (the average child laughs about 300 times a day), read the funny pages (daily), clip cartoons and amusing sayings and post them on the refrigerator, and look for the silliness during the best and worst of times.

– CAL OREY