

## ***Start a Laughter Pandemic***



Hands up: who thought 2020 would be a great year? Really, those two “0”s are just begging to be doodled in as happy faces, aren’t they?

We are 20 years out from the turn of this century and the new millennium. All those wonderful millennial babies are becoming adults, bringing their fresh talents to the world. Loved ones have planned reunions, weddings, graduations, anniversaries, travel... What could go wrong?

Twenty-twenty is a firm reminder that life isn’t fair, and seldom turns out the way we expect. If you have chosen to laugh your way through this abnormal, challenging situation, I applaud you! Given the fact that laughter is contagious (and you don’t have to be in proximity to spread it), I encourage you to start your own laughter epidemic! This article features facts about funny, and a number of quotes to get you thinking. Seriously, I hope you will share these ideas to help the spread of laughter in your community!

***“As soap is to the body, so laughter is to the soul.”*** Jewish Proverb

Whatever you had planned this year, you probably didn’t predict your need for impeccable hand hygiene, mask-crafts, and graph-reading skills! I had no idea I could live in the same clothes for three months, without the aid of personal grooming of any kind. Who knew that our government would classify the liquor and cannabis stores as ‘essential services’? (We finally agree on something!). Now that you know how to wash your hands with vigor and purpose, why not wash your soul with laughter? A number of research studies show strong evidence that laughter dilates blood vessels. This effect (after watching a 30 minute humorous video), persisted for nearly 24 hours! Mediated by the release of endorphins, our minds and arteries relax with laughter. What could be simpler or better? Therefore, when choosing your binge-watching topics, seek out the ones that make you laugh, give you hope, and focus on the positive.

***“Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.”*** Mark Twain

What makes you laugh? Often, laughter is generated with a swerve. You expect a story to go one way, then it takes a sudden turn to the unexpected or ridiculous. Isn’t that a perfect description for 2020? Are we fooling ourselves by laughing at this “unusual” year, or does laughter really help?

Laughter and a sense of humour can be bountifully beneficial when coping with tragic, or unfortunate circumstances. This does not mean cruel laughter at someone’s hardship, or making fun of sad situations. It is possible to take loss and hardship very seriously, yet find lighthearted moments to celebrate life. At my father’s funeral this year, we shared hugs and tears (he passed pre-pandemic). We also enjoyed laughter about favourite memories, and Dad’s wonderful sense of humour. My father (a cowboy), would certainly endorse Will Rogers’ words, “If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing you have to do is stop digging!”

My dragon boat team ([www.BreastStrokes.org](http://www.BreastStrokes.org)) exemplifies this philosophy, and offers wonderful support to our members. We joke about our own treatment experiences, and the joy of life after breast cancer. As a result, we refer to ourselves as a ***giggle*** of paddlers. In our case,

it's a team decision to see the lighter side of life. We're dead serious about staying healthy as we support each other. We spread 'an attitude of gratitude', as we laugh at the absurdities of life, and chuckle our way through challenging practices.

***"The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease."*** Voltaire

What can be more difficult than a global pandemic? Thousands of people have suffered tragic consequences, in a seemingly endless health crisis. A pandemic must be taken seriously, so we can find and follow the best pathway forward. However, as a herd (waiting for immunity to settle in), we can find humour in the absurdity of this hardship. Complete these sentences: "If 2020 was a song, the title would be \_\_\_\_\_" • "Instead of singing 'happy birthday' while I wash my hands, now, I \_\_\_\_\_" • "My favourite outfit for Zoom meetings is \_\_\_\_\_" • "I found a new use for my mask: \_\_\_\_\_" • Look at this picture of my self-inflicted Covid-haircut (insert photo).

***"At the height of laughter, the universe is flung into a kaleidoscope of new possibilities."*** Jean Houston

People laugh more easily and more often in a group. It is thought to be a communication technique among primates that transcends age, language, and most cultural differences.

***"Laughter serves as a blocking agent. Like a bulletproof vest, it may help protect you against the ravages of negative emotions that can assault you in disease."*** Norman Cousins

Laughter, humour, and a positive attitude, open the gates to creativity. Norman Cousins (Anatomy of an Illness), wrote: "Utilize laughter to create a mood in which the other positive emotions can be put to work for yourself and those around you."

***"(S)He who laughs, lasts!"*** Mary Pettibone Poole

Whether it is genuine, or 'fake', laughter helps you feel better. There is now a groundswell of support regarding the therapeutic value of laughter in the treatment of disease. Evidence shows that surgeons used humor to distract patients from pain as early as the 13th century. Scientific study now supports the positive effects of humour on physical and mental wellness. Now, more than ever, we need humour for therapy and healing.

***"If you can laugh in the face of adversity, you're bullet-proof."*** Ricky Gervais

Dr. Madan Kataria created Laughter Yoga, which now has over 7000 free laughter yoga clubs in more than 72 countries. Laughter yoga sessions (combining yoga breathing and simulated laughter), are available online (<https://www.youtube.com/laughteryoga>). Dr. Kataria found that laughter was therapeutic, even when it was 'artificial'. In other words, you did not have to think something was funny to receive laughter's benefits. Humour (think of stand-up comedy), often pushes the boundaries of good taste. A joke that one person finds funny, is insulting to another.

***"Always laugh when you can. It is cheap medicine."*** Lord Byron

Dr. Kataria found that simply breathing deeply and 'laughing for no reason' was therapeutic, calming, and beneficial to health. I am a certified Laughter Yoga Leader. Having attended an international LY conference, I saw this technique worked well in prisons, factories, hospitals,

and my own living room. Laughter for no reason is free. It helps people. I always connect patients in pain with Laughter Yoga. What have they got to lose?

***“No matter what your heartache may be, laughing helps you forget it for a few seconds.”*** Red Skelton

Try it right now:

- Take in a deep slow breath...
- As you breathe out, laugh as hard as you can! If you need inspiration, ‘laugh like Santa’.
- Repeat...
- Repeat...
- Repeat!

Compared with when you began the exercise, how do you feel now? My guess is you will feel somewhat breathless and more relaxed. Perhaps others nearby saw you laughing and joined in. Look for [www.LaughterYoga.org](http://www.LaughterYoga.org) chapters in your community. Lots of useful activities are available on line, for free.

***“We don’t laugh because we’re happy, we are happy because we laugh.”*** William James

We walk our parrots (yes, I know...). One of them loves imitating laughter – and sometimes starts laughing on his own, for no reason. As we walk down the street, people hearing him start laughing. He laughs louder and more, imitating their laughter. You can see where I’m going with this. Soon, everyone within earshot of this spectacle is crying with laughter. What could be better? Are you laughing now?

**Documented physical benefits of laughter include:**

- Boosting the immune system
- Enhancing oxygen intake
- Stimulating the heart and lungs
- Relaxing muscles throughout the body
- Triggering the release of endorphins
- Easing digestion
- Relieving pain
- Balancing blood pressure
- Improving mental functions

I hope you have taken time to laugh while reading this article – if only during the Laughter Yoga exercise. Laughter is helpful and healthful. Please, pass it on!

***“I have always felt that laughter in the face of reality is probably the finest sound there is and will last until the day when the game is called on account of darkness. In this world, a good time to laugh is any time you can.”*** Linda Ellerbee

## References

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# *Humour for the Health of it!*

- ☺ Laughter improves the immune system and increases resistance to disease by activating the natural killer cells, which destroy invading micro-organisms.
- ☺ Laughter decreases levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, which weakens the immune system. When you smile, your physiology will follow your face!
- ☺ Laughter releases endorphins—the body's natural opiates. Laughter relieves pain and inhibits our emotional response to pain.
- ☺ Laughter is like internal jogging. The heart, lungs, pancreas, liver, spleen, stomach, and intestines are all stimulated by laughter!
- ☺ Beware of "Negative Humour". Cynicism, sarcasm and ridicule have damaging effects on both the giver and the receiver.
- ☺ Anger and humour cannot co-exist. Seeing the humour in a bad situation can force away the negative physiological effects of anger and frustration.
- ☺ The effects of laughter are positive, but temporary. We need to laugh often! 15 minutes of daily laughter has proven physiological effects.
- ☺ People who enjoy and use humour often are less likely to suffer fatigue, tension, anger, depression, or confusion when confronted with stressful events.
- ☺ A sense of humour gives you the power to reframe your situation. You buy time and a more relaxed mind-set with which to tackle your problem. Laughter can free us to consider problems along new, creative lines.
- ☺ Hostility, irritability, explosiveness, competitiveness, and impatience, are found to be excellent predictors of coronary heart disease.
- ☺ You are the only one who has the power to make yourself happy. Seek out more humour in your life. Choose to see the humour in stressful situations. It will add years to your life and life to your years.

**Remember:**

**(S)He who laughs, LASTS!**

## Join the Optimists' Club

- ☺ View change as a challenge.
- ☺ Refuse to give up in the face of adversity.
- ☺ Consider options: "How can I change, fix, or improve this situation?"
- ☺ Have an upbeat attitude, positive self-talk, and a good sense of humour.
- ☺ Having a strong belief system – this gives you a sense of control.
- ☺ Accountability: take full responsibility for the life you want to create, your choices, actions, thoughts, and feelings.
- ☺ Reframe the problem: think of it as an opportunity. What can you learn from this situation? What is funny about the problem? How many different ways could you tackle the issue?
- ☺ **What mind-set will be healthiest for YOU in the long term?**



### ***Humour Prescription***

- **Be a humour hunter:** books, movies, clothes, accessories...
- **Plan ahead:** choose positive responses to tough situations.
- **Take time to laugh and play every day.**
- **Seek out positive people and good news.**
- **Celebrate the wonder in each day:** keep a journal.
- **See your problems as opportunities to learn and grow.**
- **Volunteer your time and talents to help others.**
- **Cultivate the habit of happiness!**

## Sabotage Stress

- ✓ **Identify stressors:** either avoid stressors, or change your response to them...
- ✓ **Take mini-breaks / 'time outs':** stretch, breathe, move, listen to music...
- ✓ **Stick to a healthy routine:** adequate exercise and rest, a healthy diet...
- ✓ **Deal with time problems:** organize, prioritize, set small goals, delegate...
- ✓ **Learn & use relaxation techniques:** Laughter Yoga, Tai Chi, Ai Chi, meditation...
- ✓ **Get Active: *Exercise is a wonderful anti-depressant!***
- ✓ **Laugh:** use humour and a positive attitude to cope; do things that give you joy...
- ✓ **Socialize (*on-line if necessary*):** friends, family, pets...
- ✓ **Plan for pleasure:** schedule some 'you' time, pamper yourself, read, rest, renew...
- ✓ **Change your style:** Hot reactor? Superwoman? Learn to let go...ask for help...



**Throw away your crutches:** alcohol, overeating, binge-watching ... Find healthy outlets like exercise, hobbies, supportive friendships...

*“Wishing for life to be different is the essence of suffering.”*

Follow an individualized plan of action like the ***Coach's Plan***, designed to keep successful athletes mentally fit:

- **When you feel stressed,** stop what you are doing and breathe deeply, relax your mind and body, then visualize your goal and see yourself achieving it.
- **Restate every negative thought with a positive statement** about your strengths.
- **Set mini behavioral goals** – actions you can take now, such as: “Today I will find three networking leads; eat healthy snacks; volunteer for a charity; call a friend ....”
- **Take action** on your identified mini-goals. You don't have to be perfect, or accomplish everything in one day. Take small steps, but keep walking!

**Making stress work for you and becoming resilient takes practice. *by Pat Boer***

- △ Resilient people aren't perfectionists who think and talk about how things should be.
- △ ***Resilient people take action, solve problems, and reserve time for renewal.***
- △ In turn, they are often among the people we most admire.

***We all have stress. Make intelligent choices about how you respond to yours.***