

Finding the Funny

1 There is one habit that is both healthy and enjoyable: laughing! People have considered laughter beneficial to health for centuries. Today, gelotology—the study of laughing—reveals how a “ha-ha” can help both mind and body.

2 Few people would deny that when we laugh, we feel good. But why? Scientists have discovered that laughter causes the release of chemicals called endorphins, hormones in the brain that reduce feelings of pain and stress and can cause people to feel happier and more relaxed. Even those with depression can feel better. Clinical psychologist Natalie Dattilo-Ryan says, “Laughter signals safety and trust and can help us co-regulate intense emotions.”

3 Furthermore, Dattilo-Ryan says laughter helps people connect with one another: “Because it can strengthen a sense of social cohesion, it can help put others at ease or [help them] feel closer to us.”

4 Laughter can also boost creativity. It releases tension and allows for perceptual flexibility, which is key to associating ideas and relationships more freely.

5 Laughter is good for your body as well. It helps with processes in the parasympathetic nervous system, a network of nerves involved in relaxation.

6 From 2016 to 2023, various Japanese studies have revealed how laughter promotes longevity by diminishing the risk of disease and disability or delaying their onset.

7 Dr. Albert Rizzo from the American Lung Association says that deep belly laughs encourage deep breathing. Hearty laughing can help lungs heal after surgery.

8 In a 2017 study, researchers at Georgia State University observed elderly adults in group exercise sessions. The adults were instructed to laugh multiple times during their workout, for 30 to 60 seconds each time, without the use of jokes, funny videos, or prompting from others. Participants reported feeling happier and more enthusiastic about exercising. Researcher Celeste Green suggested that laughter might even make people more likely to stick with an exercise program.

9 When you laugh, your body gets a mini workout. A muscle under your lungs, called the diaphragm, tightens. Your belly and chest muscles tighten too, which helps you breathe deeply. This sends oxygen-rich blood around your body. Afterward, your body feels more relaxed because your heart rate slows down.

10 Laughter causes measurable changes in your body. The endorphins it releases help reduce feelings of stress. Stress can cause your body to release high levels of another

hormone called cortisol, which negatively affects your blood pressure, immune system, and sleep habits. The UCLA Health System reports that one episode of laughter can lower your cortisol level by 37 percent.

11 Laughter may even boost your immune system. Dr. William Fry, the father of gelotology, spent more than 50 years documenting the benefits of positive psychology and laughter. He compared blood samples from people who laughed with blood samples from people who did not. He found that the people who laughed had more T cells—special cells that help fight off illness.

12 Dattilo-Ryan encourages everyone to laugh more often. “To feel good,” she says, “we have to practice feeling good.” Nursing professor Marci Catanzaro suggests finding your inner child and enjoying life’s silly moments. Laughter yoga, for example, cultivates childlike playfulness by encouraging participants to laugh in combination with breathing exercises. Finally, you can learn to laugh at yourself. Everyone has experiences that can be funny in hindsight. It does not matter *what* is funny to you. Just laugh!

13 There is a quotation attributed to William James (1842–1910), the father of American psychology: “We don’t laugh because we are happy; we are happy because we laugh.” So for the good health of your mind and your body, take the opportunity to laugh whenever you can.

Read “Finding the Funny.”

Think about how laughter can benefit mental health and physical health. Write a multi-paragraph argumentative essay in which you argue whether laughter is more beneficial to mental health or more beneficial to physical health.

Use details from the passage to support your argumentative essay.

Remember to —

- clearly state your argument
- organize your writing
- develop your ideas in detail
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar

Use the space provided to write your argumentative essay.