



How Laughter Can Help

What is there to laugh about?

The saying 'laughter is the best medicine' can be traced back to the Bible's Old Testament, Proverbs 17 verse 22, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones".

From wry smiles to hysterics, whatever your views on life, humour is very much a part of the human experience.

The June 2023 version of the medical journal, The Lancet, published an opinion piece 'From Literature to Medicine; Laughter is the best medicine', acknowledging the importance of levity amid crisis, that we aren't laughing because it is fun, but to get by, for emotional release and social support, to lighten psychological burdens and the atmosphere.

[https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)01074-7.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(23)01074-7.pdf)

Research also shows that laughter is both physically and emotionally good for us.

What part of the brain makes you laugh?

Humour is generated through a network of structures in various parts of the brain, processing different aspects of comprehension, perception, memory, feelings, identifying what is incongruous (expected and unexpected) and so on.

There are thought to be two main types of humour structure: Duchenne laughter coming from the brain stem and limbic system that governs emotions, and non-Duchenne laughter that is controlled by the frontal cortex that connects to abilities like interpretation, planning and decisions. Perhaps this is why, anecdotally many carers of those with PSP & CBD say their loved one has retained a sense of humour, because if one area that understands humour may be affected, another may not be.

For more on the science behind humour:

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/whats-so-funny-the-science-of-why-we-laugh/>

Humour – PSP & CBD

As with many neurological conditions, a wide variety of brain functions are affected, this can include sense of humour.

There is a small percentage who may experience bouts of unmotivated, uncontrolled laughter, called the pseudobulbar affect, which can present as an exaggerated response, inappropriate or unwanted.

For more information on the pseudobulbar affect speak with someone from your community neuro team, your neurologist, Parkinson's Nurse Specialist or PSPA helpline.

What are the benefits of laughter for carers?

Laughter can sometimes be “the shortest distance between two people”.

- Victor Borge (Danish American comedian and pianist)

Laughter releases endorphins, the feel-good hormones and therefore helps with:

Physical health

- Boosts immunity
- Lowers stress hormones
- Decreases pain
- Relaxes your muscles
- Prevents heart disease.

Mental health

- Adds joy and zest to life
- Eases anxiety and tension
- Relieves stress
- Improves mood
- Strengthens resilience.

Social health

- Strengthens relationships

- Connects others to us
- Enhances teamwork
- Helps defuse conflict
- Promotes bonding.

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine.htm>

When caring for your loved one, being able to take yourself lightly and diffuse situations and let-off steam may help make things easier.

Getting more Humour in your life

Watch, listen to or read more comedy. You know what makes you laugh, whether it is one-liners, slapstick physical humour, funny real-life stories, characters, mishaps, stand-up comedians or shows that make you laugh.

There are many types of humour from deadpan to wordplay, to learn more see:

<https://www.scienceofpeople.com/sense-of-humor/>

Resources for Carers

VIDEOS

The idea of doing laughter yoga is that it has the same effect on the body as laughing spontaneously.

‘5 Minute Laughter Yoga for Carers’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9yVsLfXTWs>

‘Laughter Yoga for Carers’ for National Carers Week Australia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bypt38akxU> includes introduction, mini-laughter session, laughter yoga, simulated laughter, and opening up the heart.

TED Talk: Why we should take laughter more seriously. Discusses the importance of laughter as a skill.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKYwGYrVmOo>