

# Laughing for No Reason at All . . . . .

**WARNING:** This process will take some self examination.

This laughter is not a smile of recognition or a little “tee hee,” but BELLY laughter! The kind you double over with because you can’t stop laughing at everything around you. EVERYTHING!

Children laugh 400 times a day  
Average Adult laughs 5 times a day  
Somewhere adults have lost 385 laughs a day

We seem to have a Giggle Crisis in our land. Children live in present time. Adults spend a lot of time analyzing past time and future time. We live in our heads (or our computers) Clowning is done in present time. That’s why we have the vulnerability of the child. That’s how we reach the inner child in others. That’s how we get people to laugh.

If we are to engage patients and staff in play, how do we do that if we ourselves don’t feel like it inside? Just going in and doing our magic tricks does not open our hearts to the spontaneity we need to practice hospital clowning.

Sometimes I need an attitude adjustment -- a little of my own laughter prescriptions. If I cannot laugh on the spot at nothing at all, I am a sick clown! And we hospital clowns all know we don’t work at the hospital when we are sick! So what is the medication for a grumpy sour mood? Belly laughter.

*The head thinks, the hands labor,  
but it is the heart that laughs* - Liz Curtis-Higgs

I first became aware of this “laughter lack epidemic” at clown school. Clowns were doing really funny stuff and people would say (including me) “That’s really funny” But nobody was laughing We’d smile nicely and THINK “That’s funny,” but we didn’t laugh out loud. We didn’t belly laugh! I started paying attention to my reactions to funny things on TV. I would think “That’s funny” but I wouldn’t laugh. I wasn’t getting the benefits of all those endorphins that all the humor and health people TALK about. “Humor is a perceptual process while laughter is a behavioral response.” Here we are talking about the physical laughter not as a response, but as an underutilized body function.

## **What if you could spend the rest of your life on the edge of a giggle.**

I always start my clown workshops with a 15 second belly laugh - yes 15 seconds. I used to try it for a minute, then 45 seconds, but found that this was too long. It’s down to 15 seconds! That all it takes to get into uncontrollable belly laughter for most people. It is interesting to note that men have the hardest time with this. I have even found clowns who can’t belly laugh.

*There is a form of laughter that springs from the heart, heard every day in the merry voice of childhood, the expression of a laughter - loving spirit that defies analysis by the philosopher, which has nothing rigid or mechanical in it, and totally without social significance. Bubbling spontaneously from the heart of child or man. Without egotism and full of feeling, laughter is the music of life.*

- Sir William Osler

## **Cold Start Belly Laughing**

This takes practice -- like a muscle, the more you use it the easier it is to do. So what happens after a few weeks? You begin to be able to laugh anytime. It’s a place that’s just ready to go -- like sitting on the edge of a giggle all the time. It’s wonderful. Please try it! Yes, try it right now where you are! Right now!

If you had no trouble laughing right now, you might find the following interesting. However, if you couldn’t belly laugh right now is it because you just didn’t want to? It’s not because you can’t. You can laugh, so what got in your way?

You don’t have time? It just takes 15 seconds.

What will my family think? What will the people in the office think? Or are you sitting on a bus or train reading this newsletter? If you are, please try to laugh a little right now. Come on, people will think you just read something funny. Isn’t that what we’ve been taught? To laugh at something?

Are you afraid of losing control? Belly laughter is the loss of control. But why fear it? It is fear’s antidote. It is said that if fear is the lock, laughter is the key!

I hear parents saying to their children, “Don’t act so silly!” Why not act silly? This was the whole point in our China trip. Patch would tell the hospital personnel. “It has never been proved that seriousness is good for you!” It has been proven that laughter is good for you. So why are we all so serious?

There are clowns who don’t belly laugh even in a group. I see them at my workshop in the fringe looking around sort of uncomfortable. Yes, they are laughing but not belly laughing -- not uncontrollable side-splitting laughter. I have pointed this out to some of these people who don’t even know it. Later they react “Wow, I never realized how reserved I am.” It is the same reaction I had when I discovered I didn’t laugh out loud.

*If you asked me what I came into this world to do,  
I came to live out loud. - Emile Zola*

After you belly laugh for 15 seconds, stop and sit down. How do you feel? Are you tingling all over? Do you feel lighter? Are your problems lighter? Laughter is a true alchemy (Laughter actually causes a physical change in the body). We’ve heard all the proof, but it is not humor we are speaking of here or the little smile, it is the true belly laugh that has the most transformative power. It can change our attitude. BUT we have to be willing to have our attitude change.

Deep laughter can bring up some very deep blocks. I like to call them “plugs.” Blocks seem hard to move. Plugs seem like there is a possibility of pulling them out. Can I can remember to laugh when I am uncomfortable? (I don’t say “When I feel bad - that is a judgement.) When I resist the laughing, I need to look inside to see what is plugging me up. What eventually happens is I get unplugged! What is the payoff of this exercise? You are more grounded in the moment. It is easier to meditate. I find I am aware of touching things and feeling them. I am aware of the birds and the sky. I am in the now. It’s a sort of freedom Sitting on the edge of a giggle all the time is like riding the bubbles of the waves of our life. From this vantage point it is easier to look at the power of your life both the sweet and the bitter.

*I realize that humor isn't for everyone. It's only for people who want to have fun, enjoy life, and feel alive.*

Anne Wilson Schaefer

Resistance is such a clinical word. In my world I call it stubbornness. Sometimes our stubbornness is a need to hang on to something familiar even if it is not good for us, like all bad habits. Sometimes our stubbornness is an answer to a critical parent (from childhood or the internalized kind) I have an internal drill sergeant I need to watch out for. Sometimes when I get really stubborn I have to say out loud: "I don't want to be happy!" If I think it, it doesn't work. By saying it out loud, I can see how absurdly stubborn I am, and I can work on my belly laughter. Just do it!

*The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that's laughter. The moment it arises, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments slip away, and sunny spirit takes their place. – Mark Twain*

If you can't belly laugh in public go home and follow the prescription on Page 16. I give these out with a red sponge nose to parents of hospitalized children. Or it might be easier to start with a group. Dr. Katarian has started Laughter Clubs all over the world. These are wonderful for the normal person. However, consider that we are clowns! We need to be self-motivated laughers!

How long have we been taught that there has to be a reason to laugh? What I've discovered is that you don't even need to be happy to laugh, You can be angry and laugh, but careful if you really belly laugh you may lose your anger. You may lose your pain and you may lose your fear.

*If we learn to laugh unconditionally, our happiness too will become unconditional. Therefore, liberate your laughter and happiness from reasons.... Learn to laugh for no reason at all.*

-- Dr. Madan Katarian

### ***Happiness is a process.***

### ***It isn't a place we walk to, it is the walk***

*We don't laugh because we're happy – we're happy because we laugh. – William James*

It has become common knowledge in the past 20 years that you don't figure out why an alcoholic drinks until they stop drinking. We no longer say, "If you find out the reason you smoke, you will stop." We have learned that the action of stopping has to come first. It is the same with laughter. It is an action – it is a positive action. There is no need to have a reason to laugh. It is a physiological muscle. Just do it. The happiness will come. You'll see!

*Laughter is a portable immediate therapy ... think of it as a way of "charging" up the battery of your soul.*

Annette Goodheart

We are not talking about problem solution. It's more like getting rid of the headache so you can think. This laughter is a rebalancer. The belly laugh I am speaking of should be taken like a pill - to be taken when the sense of humor is low -- to stimulate the sense of humor - to give it a jump start.

*"Give in to the power of goofiness. It lets the mind relax and catch its breath. Only goofiness has the inherent power to keep seriousness from killing off all your ideas. Ripples of laughter will wash up the brightest gems on the shore of your consciousness."*

-- Dalton Roberts

There is a product that laughter brings to your life. Laughter opens the heart. When you whole-heartedly laugh, the walls that surround you come tumbling down. Yes, you become vulnerable. Vulnerable to "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," to quote Hamlet. But what a defense laughter is to those incoming weapons - those monsters that we create in our society and our lives.

*"The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that's laughter. The moment it arises, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments slop away, and a sunny spirit takes their place." --Mark Twain*

Laughter melts the walls of all societies. I have seen it in my own life, in my travels as a clown. It speaks in all languages to all professions. I have clowned with guards carrying automatic weapons in a Saudi Arabia airport, soldiers in China, doctors in Russia, orphans in Guatemala, monks in India, dying children, and frightened parents.

"Humor is not a trick. Humor is a presence in the world -- like grace -- and shines on everybody."

--Garrison Keillor

Laughter will make us vulnerable, but it also makes us truthful. We begin to truly feel, to grieve, and to hurt, as well as to play, sing, and dance. It is in this true vulnerable place in the heart that the Clown is born. Clowns connect to our humanity. We connect heart to heart -- not a philosophical discussion, not a political debate, but a coming together of spirit. Laughter is a gift not only because it makes us happy, but also because it makes us weep, and it makes us part of the whole of human kindness.

Now it is just a matter of remembering to laugh. It has to become a habit. This has not been easy for me. I have spent my life being a serious person, a serious artist, a serious clown, and a serious hospital clown. I have to remind myself when I'm discouraged, when I'm overwhelmed, when I'm afraid, to just start to belly laugh. It's not always so easy, but my heart needs it, my body needs it and my mind needs it.

*The Zen Buddhists believe that ten minutes of laughter upon waking achieves the equivalent of 6-8 hours of meditation.*

Shobi is aspiring to the following quote. It sounds like the description of a saint. We clowns may not be saints, but we can cultivate a cheery attitude and spread laughter around our house, our neighborhood, our job, our city, our country, and our world It all begins with the willingness to laugh for no reason at all!

*Beginning with the early dawn each day, I will radiate joy to everyone I meet. I will be mental sunshine for all who cross my path. I will burn candles of smiles in the bosoms of the joyless. Before the unfading light of my cheer, darkness will take flight*

– Paramahansa Yogananda