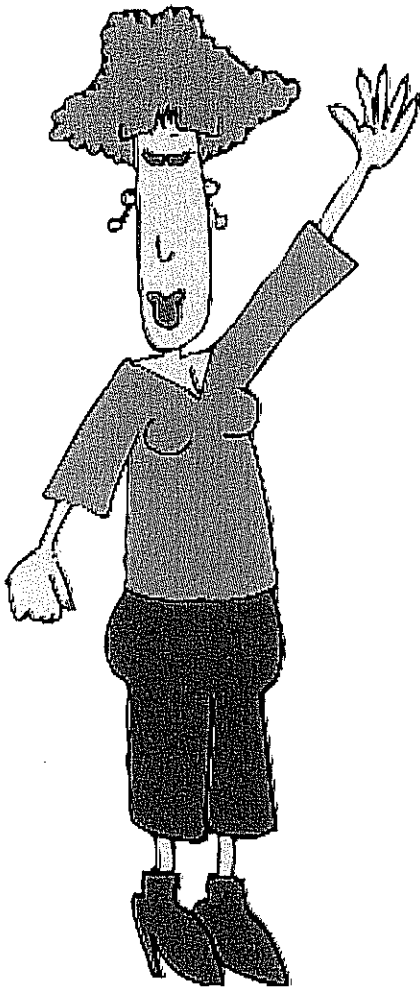


Act Happy! Live It Up! Laugh!

for the Health Of It!

by Dale Anderson, MD



Often we speak about the “good chemistry” of a relationship, the “good chemistry” of a place or the “good chemistry” of an event.

Many physicians recognize that “good chemistry” means positive feelings and good health while “bad chemistry” indicates negative feelings and poor health. The growing field of psycho-neuroimmunology (PSI) is discovering that the physiology of feelings and health can be altered by many controllable factors that positively or negatively impact individuals and society. Medical science can now prove that those who positively script, stage, costume, direct and ACT healthy and happy will impact personal and social WELL-being.

Harness the “pharmacy within”

Endorphins, with a chemical structure similar to morphine, are often referred to as the “inner uppers” that get us “high” on life. As a group, they are most often identified as “the happy chemistries” which enhance health and evidence shows they can be ACTED ON.

This sheds new light on ancient questions. Are we happy because we’re healthy, or are we healthy because we’re happy? Do we laugh because we’re happy, or are we happy because we laugh? Yes, happy people are apt to laugh often. At the same time, feelings of pleasure and happiness can result from the physical act of laugh-

ter, because laughter is a potent way to raise endorphin levels.

Those who know how to experience the joy of raising endorphin levels hold the keys to a wide range of possible benefits. Physical benefits include lessening of tissue inflammation, reduction of pain, relaxation of muscles, suppression of the appetite, and enhancement of the immune system. Psychological benefits include a sense of euphoria that can counter fear, anger and depression. People with “good chemistry” know how to “live it up” and tend to be friendlier, optimistic, humorous, creative, confident, perceptive, productive, popular, and yes, wealthier and more successful.

What you can do

The social benefits of raised endorphins are critically important for our society. The good news is that people can direct dramatic changes by learning and teaching a few actions and thought-techniques.

Endorphin levels are raised through a range of activities. Besides laughing, these include smiling, getting sufficient rest, eating, exercising, cheering, singing, listening to music, creative visualization, camaraderie and romance. Obviously not all of these are appropriate for every occasion! Yet some are, and it pays to capitalize on them. As an example, actors use many actions and thoughts in the green room to get into the “chemistry” of a happy part. Here are three simple strategies you can start using immediately:

Smile!

Smiling can produce an immediate change in physical, mental and emotional state. Test this idea for yourself and force a smile the next time you're feeling pensive or worried. Do this no matter how silly it seems at the moment and then carefully observe the resulting change in your attitude. Notice any subtle feelings of relaxation, relief or renewed perspective on life.

When we smile, we become our own physicians, filling an endorphin prescription from our pharmacy within. If we want to alter our brain chemistry, we don't have to take expensive drugs, we can just smile.

Smiling at yourself is something you can do often. Think of those times you've stood in front of the mirror and clothed yourself with a smile – before the big date, the big interview or the big meeting. Or consider searching for your face in a group picture. Chances are, you look to see what you're "wearing" on your face. If the picture shows your smile, you'll probably feel good about what you see.

So, the first and easiest way to start changing the chemistry is to "costume" your face with a smile. Ask friends and family to become aware of how much they smile at each other. Remind them of a phenomenon so commonplace that we constantly forget it – when people smile at us, we usually respond with a smile. Conversely, when we smile at others they usually smile back, and that's an "upper."

Laugh!

Next, see if you can upgrade smiles into outbursts of laughter. Many memorable events and outstanding personal encounters are those that kindled laughter. Recalling those memories can trig-

ger the physiological experiences we had during the actual event.

As an example, here's a prescription for you; fill it for yourself and then offer it to friends. It's called "Laughter RX." Stand in front of a mirror and belly laugh three times each day for at least 15 seconds at a time. It's important to approach this task with gusto, not a mere snicker or lackluster chuckle. Whenever possible, do this in the company of others because laughter is contagious. At first your family and friends will laugh at you but soon they will laugh with you. This is an easy way to start a "HAPPY-demic."

While you may feel silly doing this, you will get a good laugh out of the experience. Lead with the body and the mind will follow. In other words, let an action generate the physiology of your emotions. Don't wait to laugh until you feel happy. Laugh to boost your endorphins and then feel happy as a result. Physiology can be staged and scripted to produce the healthy pleasure that adds life to any occasion. Learn to laugh for the "health of it."

There are several ways to use the laughter prescription. Regardless, the enthusiasm and goodwill generated is a wonder of nature – living proof that "laughter is the best medicine."

Connect!

It's impossible for human beings to enjoy optimum health unless they experience genuine connection. The word "connection" in its broadest sense means bonding with friends, family, lovers, nature and community.

In its most basic definition, connection, means touch. Research among both animals and humans shows debilitating effects when touching ceases to be part of our lives. We fail to thrive physically

and emotionally and we become more insecure and prone to illness.

We can overcome this problem in small yet significant ways. A simple handshake, like a smile or laugh, has the power to bond people in non-threatening ways. When appropriate, tasteful and mutually acceptable, give a pat on the shoulder or any other every-day gesture of friendliness and support.

Of course, there are ways to foster connection other than physical touch. People appreciate being asked about their homes, families, hobbies, travel plans and social interests. This can create connections, satisfaction and relationships.

Memorable encounters with family, friends or strangers are those where participants feel a strong and lasting sense of being included and involved. These events evoke physiological feelings of belonging and camaraderie. There are no better ways to foster the healthy chemistry of happiness than smiling, laughter and connection.

So put on a smile, laugh for the "health of it" and STAY IN TOUCH! ☺

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