

Humor Me

We've all heard the adage that "laughter is the best medicine." The Bible puts it this way in Proverbs 17:22: *A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.* Medical researchers across the country are witnessing the truth in these statements.

A study by the University of Maryland claims that laughter improves the body's ability to expand and contract its blood vessels. This could lead to better coronary health and decrease heart disease. Other studies show that laughter reduces blood sugar levels, increasing glucose tolerance in diabetics and non-diabetics alike. Laughter can offset the impact of mental distress, boosting health-protecting hormones and also potentially reducing detrimental stress hormones, and even reduce physical pain (*Natural Muscle*, 11/08).

According to Dr. William Fry of Stanford University, there other physiological benefits: "Laughter causes the muscles in the abdomen, chest, and shoulders to contract, the heart rate and pulse to increase, and you have stationary jogging" (*Signs of the Times*, 4/85).

Many people are familiar with Norman Cousins' book *The Anatomy of an Illness*. Cousins suffered from a serious degenerative disease of the connective collagen tissues holding his body together. In constant pain, he had a 1-in-500 chance of improvement due to damage to his spine. Weary of all the drugs and painkillers, he decided to fight back with laughter and Vitamin C. He won. Based on a steady diet of watching laugh-out-loud comedies and taking doses of C, he regained his strength and ultimately returned to work as a writer. A decade after his illness, Cousins encountered one of his former doctors on the street. He shook the doctor's hand with such vigor and strength that the doctor was convinced of Cousins' recovery.

Some hospitals and clinics are providing space for "humor therapy rooms", inspired by the healing power that increasingly appears evident in laughter. The rooms are set up for watching funny movies and TV shows from a video library, and there are tables stacked with humorous books, cartoon collections and board games. Researchers find that patients spending time in these rooms before surgery can dramatically decrease their anxiety, and even stimulate their immune system.

It was more than 2,500 years ago that the Bible told us "a joyful heart is good medicine". Now modern science is saying, "Hey, guess what! A joyful heart is good medicine!"

It's kind of funny, don't you think?

~Cuyler