



Power Up With Laughter

Welcome to the first edition of Power Up! Each month you will find encouraging timely information and anecdotes to illustrate the tremendous power available to you. Our focus in this issue is the power of laughter.

Is the heart really connected to the funny bone?

The bible tells us in Proverbs 17:22 that “a merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” This biblical truth appears to be spreading throughout society. So much so that researchers are studying it to find scientific proof of its benefits. In recent studies, laughter has proven to reduce stress, lower blood pressure, boost the immune system, improve brain function and protect the heart. How can something as simple and basic as a good laugh fight against certain types of diseases? The answer is quite simple. Laughter activates the chemistry of the will to live and increases our capacity to fight against disease.

Have you ever noticed that when you are feeling down your heart feels heavy? Historically, research has shown that distressing emotions; such as depression, anger, anxiety and stress are all related to heart disease. This is not to say that you will develop heart disease because you feel down, but it is not too far a stretch to realize that you are not generating a lot of power if you are depressed, stressed or anxious. These emotions can actually lead to illness which saps physical and mental power.

The University of Maryland Medical Center conducted a study that suggest a good sense of humor and the ability to laugh at stressful situations helps mitigate the damaging physical effects of distressing emotions. UMMC also notes that, laughter, along with an active sense of humor, may help protect you against a heart attack.

The study found that people with heart disease were 40 percent less likely to laugh in a variety of situations compared to people of the same age without heart disease. Likewise, people who laugh on a regular basis have a lower blood pressure than the average person. A good laugh, initially, increases the blood pressure, then decreases to levels below normal and then breathing becomes deeper which sends oxygen, enriched blood and nutrients throughout the body.

Laughter can also improve our mental health. Health professionals say that “humor can teach perspective by helping patients to see reality rather than the distortion that supports their distress.” Dr. Faiz Qadri, the director of the Creighton University Mood Disorders Clinic, conducted a study where half of the patients regularly watched a mix of movies, including action, adventure, drama and comedies. The other half only watched comedies. After 3 months, those who only watched comedies were found to have measurable enhanced positive attitudes and social interactions. Maybe this is why the movie reviews describe comedies as the “feel good movie of the year”.

In a world where nearly two-thirds of every adult is over-weight or obese, laughter is now joining the fight against the battle of the bulge. A brand of psychology called "laughter therapy" is finding its way into hospitals and a new exercise movement called Laughtercising has come on the scene. When Chicago public relations pro Betty Hoeffner decided to make a CD of uproarious laughter, her friends thought she was crazy. She had been using laughter to reduce stress for years and was convinced 10 minutes of laughter a day would reduce stress for others so she founded the Laughtercising program and produced the "Laugh it Off" CD. "It's just laughing but you have to work up to the 10 minutes, as with any exercise," says Hoeffner.

Laughter, like breathing, is one of our birthrights and even if you grew up in a household that was "laughter-challenged", it is never too late to learn to laugh and brighten your mood. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Smile. Smiling is the beginning of laughter and it is very contagious.
2. Count your blessings. Thinking on the good things in life will distance you from negative thinking.
3. When you hear laughter, move toward it. Most people don't mind letting you in on their joke because it gives them another opportunity to laugh.
4. Spend time with funny people. Spending time with funny people immediately brightens your mood.

Now let's Power Up! with laughter.

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