

# Diabetes Newsletter



1600 North Second Street

January 1, 2009

Volume 18, Issue 1

## The Joke's on You: Laugh Yourself Healthier By: Leigh Anne Jasheway

8 December 2008

I saw this article on the DiabetesHealth Professional newsletter. I thought it was a good article and wanted to share it with you.

*A doctor is trying to get his patient, an overweight man with diabetes, to lose some weight. "I want you to eat what you always do for two days, then skip a day, then repeat this for two weeks. When you come back, you should have lost five pounds." A month later when the patient returns, he's lost 20 pounds. The doctor is amazed. "Was it hard to follow my instructions?" he asks. "Well, on the third day, I thought I'd die," the man replied. The doctor nodded. "From hunger?" "No," the man replied, "From the skipping."*

If you laughed at this joke, you may have just improved your blood glucose, at least according to a study at the University of Tsukuba in Ibaraki, Japan. Researchers there found that people who laughed at a comedy show after dinner experienced a lower spike in blood sugar following their meal than those who didn't do something that made them laugh. The conclusion, as reported in the May issue of *Diabetes Care*, was that for patients with diabetes, "daily opportunities for laughter" are important. Although this may be the first study looking at the link between laughter and blood sugar, there has been plenty of research showing that having a sense of humor can help people with diabetes live healthier lives. Dr. William Fry of Stanford University, for example, has reported from his research that laughing improves oxygen flow, helps blood vessels expand and contract more easily, and stimulates heart and blood circulation, just like any standard aerobic exercise.

The cardiovascular benefits are so great that a study at the University of Maryland Medical Center concluded that laughter may help prevent heart disease. Another humor researcher, Dr. Lee Berk of Loma Linda University, has concluded that regular laughter helps boost the immune system and raise antibody levels. There are also hundreds of studies documenting the benefits of laughter on reducing stress levels and helping us feel less anxious about health and other problems in our lives.

But can you actually improve your sense of humor? The answer is a resounding "Yes." Like any other healthy activity, by setting goals and regularly practicing new behavior, you'll eventually get better at finding the funny in everyday life. The good news is that learning to use your sense of humor to boost your health is actually fun.

### **Your Laughter Goal**

Studies have found that on average, American adults laugh about fifteen times a day (compared to hundreds of times for young children.) You probably don't have any idea what your LL (laughter level) is, so try keeping a log of every laugh you get during the next week. An initial goal is to laugh once an hour, which will get you up to average. Once there, you should then try to find something to

laugh at least twice an hour. Just as with exercise, a little is good, but more is better (unless, of course, you've recently had your appendix removed). But unlike exercise, it is better to laugh a little throughout the day than to try to laugh for a solid 20 minutes at a time.

### **Becoming a Better Laugher**

Most people think that the best way to put more laughter in their lives is to start watching funny movies or stand-up comedy. In fact, those can help. But the truth is that most of the things we laugh at every day aren't meant to be funny-they're just things that happen and we choose to find the humor in them. For example, I was once almost run over by a guy driving a Jeep Cherokee with a bumper sticker on the back that read, "Mean people suck." Rather than fuming about the situation, I laughed (especially after I decided that the driver probably hadn't put that bumper sticker there himself, and I imagined a neighbor sneaking over under cover of darkness to do the deed).

Life throws funny stuff at us all the time, but we are often too busy to pay any attention to it. And many of us have voices in our heads that remind us to "Grow up and get serious," tell us to "Act our age," or insist "That's not funny." When it comes to using your sense of humor to live a healthier life, a good first step is to let go of your need to be serious all the time. The ability to feel playful and receptive to the lighter side of everything-including diabetes and its complications-can help you easily get more laughter in your life.

### **Try these out for laughs**

Reconnect with your inner five-year-old. At five, we don't have many responsibilities and our lives are primarily about having fun. Remember when your mother would call you in for dinner and you'd respond with "I'm not done having fun yet?" We may not be able to age backwards, but we can definitely spend some more time acting childlike.

- Carry a picture of your younger self in your wallet next to your driver's license as a reminder of the more playful you
- Play with your young kids or grandkids or those of friends and family on a regular basis
- Use your whole body for play. Go to a local school on the weekend and teeter-totter; invite your friends to play Leapfrog or Red Rover; or take an improv class. All of these are good ways to reconnect your funny bone with the rest of your body (and you'll get exercise to boot).

### **Take humor breaks to release tension**

Take laughter breaks during moments of stress. Just as laughter can improve our health, stress can make it worse, so the ability to laugh during stress is doubly effective at helping us live better lives.

- Read funny greeting cards when you're about to boil over. There are so many different types of greeting cards, you're bound to find some that turn on your sense of humor.

Walk funny. No, I don't mean like Monty Python's Ministry of Silly Walks (although those episodes always makes me laugh...look up "Ministry of Silly Walks" on YouTube...) Just go for a walk and look for things that make you giggle-a squirrel taunting a cat or a Golden Retriever enamored of a dachshund. I once saw a teenager whose low-rider pants actually did fall off while he was walking down the street listening to his iPod. I just knew that would happen if I waited long enough.

- Buy silly things to distract yourself. If you find yourself regularly getting annoyed while on hold, for example, you might keep a pirate finger puppet on your desk and use pirate lingo to crack yourself up until an operator comes on the line.
- Just fake it. Studies show you don't have to feel like laughing to get the benefits of just doing it.
- Make funny friends. Funny friends not only make you laugh easily and often (if they didn't, they wouldn't be your funny friends, now would they?), they can also teach you how to look for the

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funnier side of life. I have a friend named Nick who is very heavy. One day we went to lunch and the waitress took a long time to make it to our table. "I'm sorry about the wait," she apologized. Nick smiled at her and said, "Honey, I've weighed this much for so long, it really doesn't bother me any more." Spending lots of time with friends who crack you up can help you achieve your humor goals.

When it comes to managing diabetes, laughter may not be the best medicine, but it certainly is a great (and fun) tool for living a healthier, longer life.

*Leigh Anne Jasheway is a humor and health expert who has been teaching people how to lighten up for fifteen years. She is the author of fifteen books, including Don't Get Mad, Get Funny and Yoga for Your Funny Bone.*

### Clinton Support Group

### Warsaw Support Group

**TOPIC**

Diabetes Bingo

**DATE**

Thursday,  
January 8, 2009

**TIME**

10:30—11:30 a.m.

**PLACE**

GVMH Medical Plaza Classroom

**Presented By:**

Jamie Ketterman, RN, BSN, CDE

**TOPIC**

Diabetes Bingo

**DATE**

Tuesday,  
January 13, 2009

**TIME**

11:30 am—12:30 p.m.

**PLACE**

Warsaw GVMH Medical Clinic Rehab Gym

**Presented By:**

Jamie Ketterman, RN, BSN, CDE

