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**How to
Lose Weight
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5

WAYS TO
**PREVENT
COGNITIVE
DECLINE**



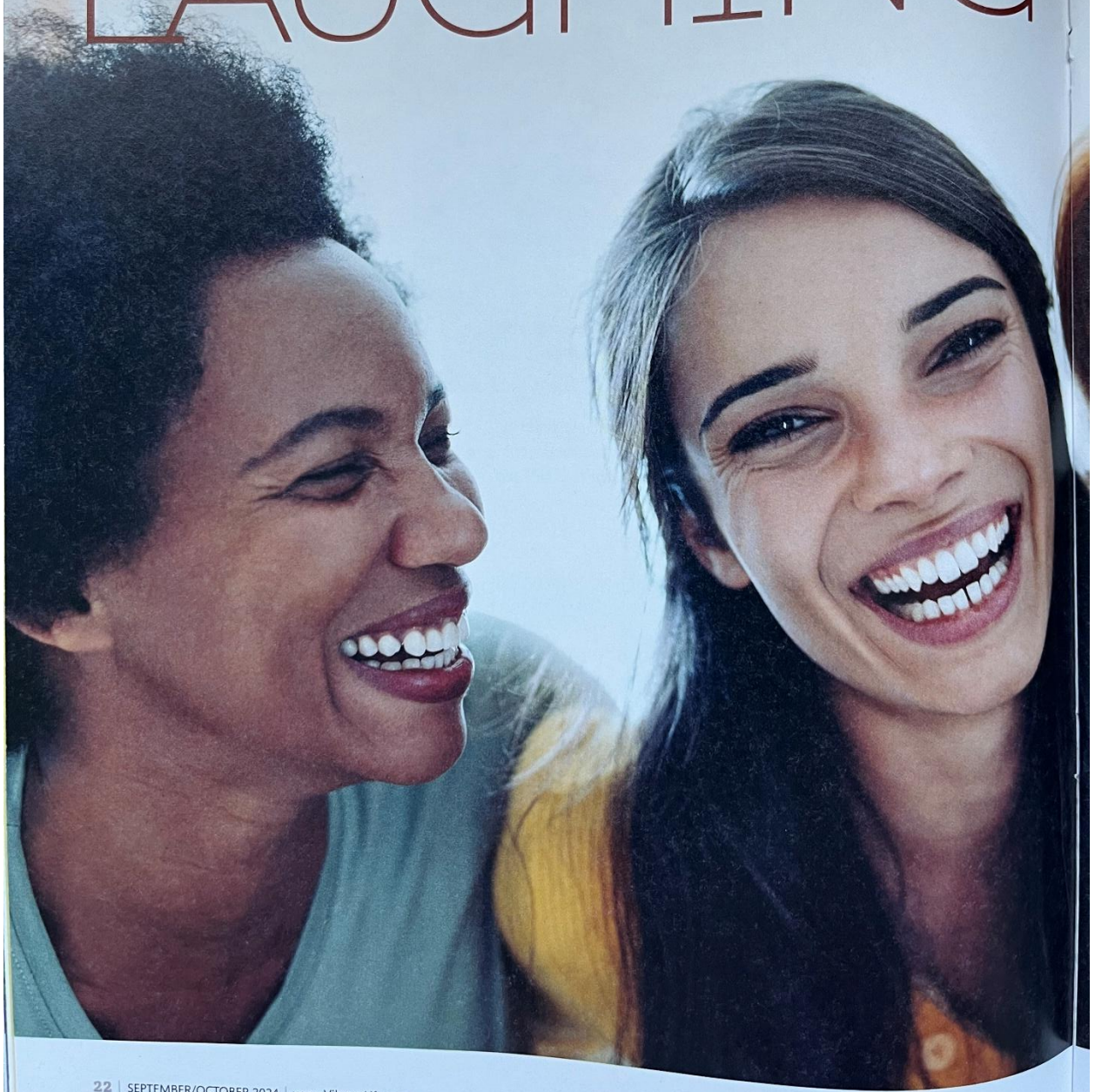
**Why
Laughter** *is*
Good for You

**Improve Your
Cellular Health**

**Boost Your
Social Fitness**

7 TIPS TO **EASE
HOMEWORK
FRUSTRATION**

THE LAUGHING



CURE



How Laughter
Changes Your
Mind, Body,
and Spirit

Sometimes life can be tough. Whether we are feeling anxious about current affairs or are dealing with a health issue, something as simple as laughter—believe it or not—can help us persevere. As adults, we tend to get bogged down by our to-do lists and the stresses of daily life and forget how beautiful it is to have a good laugh. One study found that children may laugh as much as 400 times per day, but adults only laugh 15 times per day.

By Sandi
Schwartz

If we stop for a moment and observe the children around us, they are probably laughing and playing freely without the weight of the world on their shoulders. When it comes to being lighthearted and not taking everything so seriously, we can learn from children.

We can break the lack-of-laughter cycle by taking steps to create a more positive, giggle-inducing environment to help both young and old live a happier, healthier life.

What Happens in Your Body When You Laugh

Science shows that laughter really is like medicine. According to the Mayo Clinic, laughing is one of the easiest ways to reduce stress and anxiety. Laughing transforms your body and mind in so many amazing ways, boosting positive emotions like happiness and peace.

When you laugh, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex of your brain is activated. This

releases feel-good hormones called endorphins that allow you to experience pleasure and satisfaction. Laughing also reduces your stress response because the level of stress hormones are lowered. You'll also feel energized since you take in more oxygen-rich air when you laugh. Finally, laughing relaxes your muscles, which soothes tension from stress. In fact, a good belly laugh can leave muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes afterward.



Even a Fake Smile Will Make You Feel Better

Interestingly, the muscles that help you smile affect how you feel. When you use these muscles, you trigger a part of the brain that improves mood.

In a study, participants were asked to hold a pencil in one of three ways in order to get them to make certain facial expressions without telling them exactly what they were doing. The first group held the pencil sideways in their mouths in a way that forced a smile. The second group held the pencil in their mouth lengthwise to force a frown. The last group, serving as the control group, held the pencil in their hands. Participants were then asked to look at comic strips and rate how funny they were to them. The group with the sideways pencils (the “smiling” group) had higher funny ratings than the lengthwise group (the “frowning” group). The control group scored between the other two groups. This study demonstrates how smiling and laughing can really make a difference in how we perceive the world around us.

Researchers also found that facial expressions can reduce negative feelings like pain and sadness. In another study, researchers applied an uncomfortable level of heat to

FUN FACTS ABOUT LAUGHTER

- Teachers who use humor are better able to connect with their students.
- When couples talk about funny shared memories, it boosts their relationship satisfaction.
- Strangers who laugh together instantly feel a sense of closeness and are more likely to open up.
- Toddlers learn new tasks more easily when they are laughing.
- When a person has a sense of humor, it is a sign of mental fitness, according to studies.



subjects' arms and then instructed them to make either a relaxed face, an uncomfortable face, or a neutral face. The results showed that the people who made a relaxed face experienced less pain than those who made an uncomfortable or neutral face. This happens because smiling releases endorphins and serotonin, which are thought to minimize pain.

The Mental and Emotional Benefits of Laughter

Laughter is also beneficial because it changes your perspective about a situation. A silly moment can offer a healthy distraction from negative emotions, such as anger, guilt, and stress. It sure is hard to feel negatively when you are cracking up! It can also give you a more lighthearted perspective when faced with challenges and can help you view such events as positive opportunities instead of threats.

Next, laughter builds resilience, the ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, and significant sources of stress. When individuals are resilient, they are braver, more curious, more adaptable, and more able to obtain happiness and success.

Additionally, resilience can help cushion you from mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, because it improves your ability to cope, according to Mayo Clinic. Laughter plays a critical role in how you handle adversity by allowing you to have a brief, healthy escape from your problems. By learning how to laugh even in times of pain, you can become more resilient.

Laughing with your loved ones is extra special because it has been shown to help build a strong bond among people. Shared laughter creates connections as well as a more uplifting environment overall. What's really fun is that laughter tends to be contagious, so before you know it, the whole group will be giggling up a storm.

Finally, the best part of laughing is that it's completely free and always accessible to us, without any side effects (except for maybe a few aches on your side from laughing so hard).



HOW TO ADD MORE LAUGHTER TO YOUR LIFE

Here are some simple ideas to get you and your friends and family rolling (on the floor . . .).

- Start a laughing contest to see who can make the other person laugh first.
- Play fun games, like charades, Twister, or Pictionary.
- Read joke books and websites, and then share your favorites with each other.
- Create funny stories by having one person start a story with a sentence, then the next person adds the next sentence, and on it goes, from person to person. Or build a humorous tale with Mad Libs or the Telephone Game, in which a phrase or story is whispered from person to person. When the last person announces what they heard, the original story has usually changed in laughable ways.
- Have a group talent show and see who comes up with the most hilarious routines.
- Dress up in silly costumes with your children or grandchildren.
- Watch a comedy television show or movie together.
- Keep a collection of funny quotes, comics, or pictures that you can bring out when someone needs a laugh. ▼

Sandi Schwartz is an award-winning author and journalist who has written extensively on wellness.