

For Our Longer Lives

By Kathy Werle

Laugh your way to good health

"All together now, Ho, Ho, Ho, Ha, Ha, Ha; up on your toes, stretch to the ceiling, arms down, clap, clap, clap, very good, very good, yay." Repeat. What were the OPALS (older people with active lifestyles) at the October Third Thursday Forum doing that caused such frivolity? Certified laughter yoga instructor Betsy Mercer presented strong research on the health benefits of laughter yoga while guiding the smiling attendees in laughter yoga exercises.

"Just what is laughter yoga?" you may ask. According to Dr. Madan Kataria, a physician from India who developed the modality, it is a blend of yogic deep breathing, stretching and laughter exercises that cultivate childlike playfulness. A laughter exercise is an activity that can help you laugh for no reason.

For centuries there have been references to laughter having medicinal qualities. We've heard the familiar saying, "laughter is the best medicine." In 1979, Norman Cousins wrote *Anatomy of an Illness*, which documents his humor-based regimen to recover from an illness from which doctors said he had little chance of recovering. In the 1700s, Voltaire wrote: "The art of medicine consists in amusing the patient while nature cures the disease."

Ms. Mercer said that more than 300 clinical studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals documenting the health benefits of laughter to a person's body. She said it has been found through blood and saliva tests that laughter triggers an increase in endorphins and a decrease in the stress hormone cortisol. She went on to cite a 2011 Oxford University study showing a 15-minute sustained laughter session can provide up to two hours of pain relief without drugs. She said

The Holiday Season Is Upon Us

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Scam of the Month: door-to-door solicitors

Carteret County has seen an increase in the past month in door-to-door soliciting for cleaning products and services. Reports have indicated that several subjects will knock on a person's door and offer to go inside and give a demonstration of some cleaning products they are selling. If the homeowner refuses, the subjects tend to get extremely insistent and borderline verbally aggressive.

Soliciting to sell goods or services in Pine Knoll Shores is prohibited without a permit that is only granted through the Police Department. If someone knocks on your door and you do not know them and are not expecting company, please do not answer the door. Soliciting to sell goods or services is a common way for criminals to develop potential targets and victims.



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researchers at Osaka University discovered that one-hour laughter sessions twice a week lowered blood pressure. Ms. Mercer said she could personally attest to that.

Another study Ms. Mercer mentioned told of a community of elderly persons who found laughter therapy to be cost effective and easily accessible, with positive effects on depression, insomnia and sleep quality. She went further to note studies in dementia patients which have shown laughter can help short-term memory, slowing the disease progression and reducing the need for some medications.

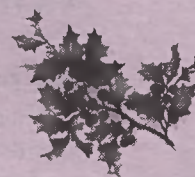
A study done in 2005 at the Maryland School of Medicine showed laughter to be linked to the healthy function of blood vessels. Laughter causes the tissue that forms the inner lining of blood vessels, endothelial cells, to expand in order to increase blood flow, while stress has the opposite effect, constricting blood vessels and reducing blood flow. The Mayo Clinic advises that laughter stimulates circulation, increases heart rate and can aid in muscle relaxation. Ms. Mercer likes to think of laughter as mental floss—used daily, it reduces mental decay.

Ms. Mercer said the American Cancer Society has endorsed the use of laughter therapy in its treatment arsenal, in part because of a nursing faculty study at the University of Western Kentucky in 2003 which discovered that humor increases a body's production of natural killer cells as measured by cytotoxicity assay. The 1931 Nobel Prize winner in physiology, Dr. Otto Warburg, said deep breathing techniques, which increase oxygen to the cells, are important factors in living a disease-free and energetic life. He went on to say when cells get enough oxygen, cancer will not, cannot occur.

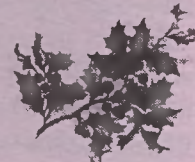
The studies seem endless. Loma Linda University determined that combining mirthful laughter with standard diabetic treatment more than doubles the reduction of C-reactive protein, a marker for inflammation in the arteries, and laughter yoga is offered to patients receiving dialysis in some hospitals. According to a report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Dr. Hajima Kimata of Unitika Central Hospital in Japan studied the effects of laughter on patients allergic to dust mites, cedar pollen and cat dander. Skin prick tests showed allergic reactions of comedy watchers were reduced for four hours after the screening of a funny movie.

Laughter triggers a different breathing pattern that offers significant respiratory benefits. It lowers the amount of residual air in the lungs, replacing it with oxygen-rich air.

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Save the Date



Members of the Age-Friendly Advisory Committee

wish you a most Joyous and Loving Christmas

and

Peaceful and Prosperous New Year.

There will be no Forum in December.

The Third Thursday Forums will resume on January 19;
watch this space for our exciting 2017 programs.

*We are thankful for all who attended our Forums in 2016,
and look forward to seeing you all next year.*