

# No Laughing Matter



Life can be far too serious, we agreed - which is ridiculous, given that none of us is getting out of it alive. Last week a group of women told me of a distinct lack of joy in their lives, and we decided that it was no laughing matter. Quite literally so.

Children laugh readily and frequently – some studies say 300-400 times per day. Their giggles are infectious and the joy found in little things is a delight to be around. As adults, though, life seems to assume a heavier mantle, and apparently the average adult (you know who you are) only laughs 12-15 times per day. Whatever your numbers, it's the contrast that speaks loudest.

Far from being a childish activity, laughter is, as the saying goes, the best medicine. If you've failed, yet again, on your New Year resolution to get fit, you'll be glad to know that one minute of laughing equates to six minutes on the treadmill and promises far more pleasure. Even better, laughter releases tension, lowers anxiety, aids circulation and boosts your immune system. It's almost impossible to laugh and be angry at the same time, as endorphins, those feel-good hormones, flood our bodies when we laugh. Laughter makes pain more bearable and laughing while doing things we don't like makes them easier to do. Far better than a spoonful of sugar.

Opportunities to laugh uproariously over completely ridiculous things are often too infrequent. For me, it's usually over dinner with three of my closest friends. We poke fun at life and tease each other, playing with words and roaring until our bellies ache and there's a queue for the bathroom. Laughter cements our relationships too. We know that even in tough times, shared laughter keeps us deeply connected with each other. Through death and drama, the bittersweet humour of irony gives us permission to laugh in the face of the unthinkable, as an expression of love and compassion.

So, if laughter is an antidote for what ails you, how else can it be administered? My grandson Jack giggles as babies do, a hearty, infectious rumble that encourages us all to join in. My Tom-cat demands playtime after each meal and his acrobatic leaps are a constant source of delight. Playing with children and pets is obvious, and we laugh more often when we're interacting with others. But how about an intravenous shot of Comedy Central? Creating a Pinterest board or covering the fridge with funny photos and sayings? Subscribing to your favourite cartoon strip? Watching a funny movie? A board game or post-dinner charades? Even the corny Christmas cracker jokes in at your mid-winter gathering?



One of my favourites is a laughter meditation. Sounds odd, but it works. Get comfy and close your eyes; imagine something really funny and then let the feeling of laughter spread from top to toe. Go on, give it a go and feel the fizzy bubbles that generate! Elsewhere, laughter yoga classes combine laughing for no reason with breathing exercises to produce the same physiological benefits as belly laughter. There are laughter clubs across New Zealand – just ask google.

It doesn't matter so much how you get there, endorphins don't judge the quality of your humour or the company you keep. In writing this, I asked a friend for her take on gender differences around humour. She replied that women like men who make them laugh, and men like women who laugh at their jokes!

Life is lumpy and often hard, and that's exactly why we need laughter so much. The poet Ogden Nash wrote that you are only young once, but you can stay immature indefinitely. Laughter allows us to be playful, to be child-like, if not childish. Giving our adult selves permission to laugh and look for laughter in all the right (and wrong) places is a catalyst for joy. It's up to us to make it a habit.

Oh, by the way, did you hear the one about the boy, talking to his teacher? 'My father's name is Laughing and my mother's name is Smiling. The teacher says: 'You must be joking?' Boy: 'No, that's my brother, I'm Kidding.'

Jenny Magee works with Boomers to make the most of the second half of their lives. Her latest book **A Bold Life – How Boomer Women are Reinventing Life Beyond Fifty** is available at good bookstores or from [www.jennymagee.com](http://www.jennymagee.com) If you are looking to make significant changes, contact Jenny via email to [jenny@jennymagee.com](mailto:jenny@jennymagee.com)

