



LAUGHTER YOGA



Why laugh?

In the 1960's, renowned journalist Norman Cousins cured himself of a painful, diagnosed-terminal disease by locking himself into a hotel room and watching a steady supply of funny movies and TV shows. His acclaimed book Anatomy of an Illness told the tale of his recovery and led to extensive medical research.

Benefits of Laughter may include:

- **Relieves stress** (reduces adrenaline and cortisol)
- **Reduces anxiety, fear, depression** (raises serotonin levels)
- **Enhances the immune system** (increases lymphocytes, moves the lymph, boosts natural anti-viral and anti-cancer cell activity)
- **Improves respiratory and cardiovascular systems** (dilates blood vessels, balances blood pressure; increases lung capacity and heart resiliency)
- **Relieves pain** (produces endorphins, the body's natural pain-killers/feel-good hormones - or at least has an endorphin-like effect; generates the natural "chemistry of happiness")
- **Improves sleep patterns**
- **Benefits digestion and elimination systems** (sometimes called "internal jogging")
- **Encourages relaxation** (after the actual laughing)
- **Boosts self-confidence, promotes compassion, deepens creativity**

It is said that children may laugh hundreds of times each day, yet most adults are lucky if we laugh 15 times - in a *good* day. (Can you remember the last time you laughed even 200, times in one day?) When we practice intentional laughter, not only do we reduce our general stress level, we also actually develop our sense of humor. We are more likely to find things amusing and are able to see the lighter, brighter side of life.

"Laughter does not solve your problems, but it can help dissolve your problems." ---Dr. Kataria

When we laugh, even for no reason, many of the damaging effects of stress are neutralized and we return to a state of balance and peace. **Thanks to the discovery and development of Laughter Yoga, you need never be "stressed out" again.**

What is "Laughter Yoga"?

Laughter Yoga is the brainchild of Doctor Madan Kataria, a physician from Bombay India, and his wife Madhuri, a yoga teacher. In 1995 Dr. Kataria was doing research to write an article to be entitled "Laughter: The Best Medicine." He resolved to experience for himself the benefits of a consistent daily laughter practice. He convinced a handful of people in a park in Bombay (who regularly went there to do did walking exercises) to add laughter practice for a while. After two weeks of using jokes and funny stories as a stimulus to laugh, the members grew tired of hearing the same old lines (and some jokes were offensive or simply not amusing). Dr. Kataria promised to come up with a way to laugh without resorting to jokes or humor; a method whereby people could laugh just as a form of exercise to improve one's health and sense of well-being.

Some of the earliest laughter exercises were adaptations of Yoga postures and breathing techniques (Lion, Mountain, "Bellows" breath, etc.). Dr. Kataria enhanced these practices by replacing yoga's typically quiet exhalations with unconditional laughter. To everyone's delight it was soon discovered that any forced laughter rapidly

became genuine heartfelt laughter when done in the company of other mirth-minded people. Even if the laughter started out fake it soon became real. Even so, research has shown that whether the laughter is artificial (self-generated) or real (externally-activated), the body produces the physiological benefits of a good hearty laugh.

There are now 8,000 Laughter Clubs throughout the world (more than 3,000 in India alone) and the number is growing rapidly.

A typical laughter session would include: easy stretches, breathing practices, and an assortment of intentional laughter techniques. These are simple to follow and very pleasant to perform. The individual can choose their level of participation, from gentle to vigorous; the experience is suitable for all ages and all levels of ability. In addition to the numerous health benefits, laughter buddies tend to form caring, supportive friendships.

If it's not about stretching, why use the word "Yoga?"

Laughter Yoga is based in breathing techniques (*Pranayama*) from traditional yoga, except laughter is performed in place of the typically silent exhalation.

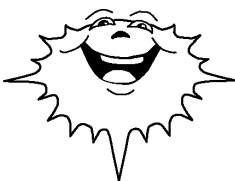
On a deeper level, the Sanskrit word "yoga" translates into English as "union" or "yoke". It describes a philosophical path towards the individual's union with their own nature. There are many styles, or paths, of Yoga, accommodating the different dispositions of different people. Karma Yoga is concerned with actions; practitioners perform acts of selfless service, kindness, generosity, helpfulness, etc. (one example of a famous Karma Yoga advocate is Mother Theresa). Bhakti Yoga is a path concerned with devotional acts, which may include singing, chanting, or performing rituals. There are also paths of Yoga which focus on prayer, studying scriptures, or awakening physical/spiritual energies.

The most well-known style of Yoga is Ha-tha (Sanskrit words meaning "sun-moon"), which is concerned with balancing energies and is enacted by the famous yoga postures, or *asanas*, which stretch the physical body in various balanced ways.

Doctor Kataria developed (and continues to develop) a path he has named "Hasya" Yoga ("hasya" being the Sanskrit word for laughter). Through Laughter Yoga practices, the individual deepens their breathing, improves their physical health, releases negative thoughts/emotions, and gets in touch with their spiritual nature. This leads effortlessly to attitudes of compassion, forgiveness, generosity, kindness, and actively seeking the happiness of others. In this way, Laughter Yoga truly is a yogic path. It does not require the physical dexterity and stretching of Hatha Yoga; nonetheless, Laughter Yoga practice does have numerous physical benefits (strengthening the immune, respiratory and cardiovascular systems, etc.) as well as bringing tranquility, joy and love to the mind and soul; the same spiritual benefits desired by all the paths of Yoga.

The ultimate mission of Laughter Yoga is the achievement of World Peace through Laughter. (No kidding.)

Written by and © Jeffrey Briar, CLL, CLYL, and CLYT (Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher)



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