

## Humor and Aging

*"The idea is to die young as late as possible." –Dr. Ashley Montagu*

By Patt Harper

Do you fear getting older, or see it as a process to be feared and despised? A healthy sense of humor and hearty laughter can help one cope with the changes, challenges and unexpected obstacles that can come with aging. People who can laugh at their temporary defeats no longer feel sorry for themselves. They feel stimulated, inspired and in charge of the situation.

As we grow older we have some difficult issues that we may not have been prepared to face. Subjects such as: loss, personal limitations, mortality and the nagging question: "is this all there is?" can consume us with anxiety and depression. Humor can become a natural way of coping. "Older people need not undergo a prescribed disengagement from life. A sense of humor and much laughter remain critical to our sense of well being" says Dr. Alvin Pouissant.

Laughter removes the space between people. It makes them feel more connected and part of a group. Healthy laughter helps reduce tension, promotes cooperation, decreases loneliness and helps restore balance and vitality. It can help renew a social life that may have started to wane. It can be a great "ice breaker" in meeting new people and forming new relationships. Humor is a great antidote for boredom. It is the surprise element that gets our attention and keeps things interesting. It can help us look forward to trying new things; appreciate what we have and live life to the fullest.

Laughter can also be beneficial to our physical health. William F. Fry, PhD of Stanford University and one of the leading researchers in the field of humor physiology states "Laughter has an impact on most if not all of the major human body systems." Dr. Fry likens the effects of laughter to physical exercise. While laughing may not compare episode for episode with marathon running or swimming, it does not require fancy equipment, training or special abilities. Everyone has the ability to laugh. It is only a matter of choice.

Despite the clinical evidence of humor and laughter as important elements of a health regimen, many people are reluctant to take the plunge. Laughter and play are undervalued in our culture and are often associated with immature and frivolous activities. We need to recognize that laughing is advantageous and necessary for better health. *"Always laugh when you can. It is cheap medicine."* – Lord Byron

A great way to start is by giving yourself permission to play. Remind yourself that you deserve to be healthy and happy. Make a conscious effort of putting humor into your daily routine. Strive to play and laugh no less than one hour per day. Make a list of at least forty fun things to do, half of which cost less than \$5. Having a list of options takes the stress out of thinking about what to do.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Blow bubbles
- Watch comedies
- Surround yourself with fun people.
- Read children's books
- Have a joke file and read it often
- Play a kazoo

Laughter may not help us live longer or healthier, but it can certainly help us to be happier.

**Patt Harper is a motivational humorist, trainer and author. She has spoken before and worked with organizations across the United States and Canada. Her hands on presentations are designed to teach participants to use humor more effectively and be well in mind, body, and spirit. Patt is a Certified Laughter Leader through the World Laughter Tour organization. Learn more at [www.LAFF4Life.com](http://www.LAFF4Life.com). You can contact her at [patthaha@aol.com](mailto:patthaha@aol.com).**