

World Laughter Day

Every year, on the first Sunday in May, World Laughter Day celebrates the positive effect that deep laughter can have on us all.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to gather
2. to found something
3. to release
4. to associate
5. to diagnose someone with something
6. an approach
7. out loud
8. to be up and about

Definition

- a. to start something such as a school, company, organisation, etc.
- b. to recognise and name an illness or health problem
- c. to be out of bed and doing things, especially after an illness
- d. to come together in a group
- e. loudly enough to be heard
- f. to make a connection in your mind between one thing and another
- g. to allow a substance to flow out
- h. a way of doing something

World Laughter Day

For over 25 years, on the first Sunday in May, thousands of people from more than 120 countries get together and celebrate World Laughter Day. And what do they do? They laugh and laugh ... and laugh! People from 'laughter clubs' in cities and towns across the planet invite their friends and family members to join them, usually in public spaces. One very large 'laughter event' took place in the year 2000, when 10,000 people of different ages and backgrounds gathered in the Town Hall Square of Copenhagen, Denmark – to laugh!

The Yoga Laughter Movement

The very first World Laughter Day took place in 1998 in a park in the city of Mumbai, India. It was organised by Dr Madan Kataria, the person who also founded Laughter Yoga. Laughter Yoga is not about thinking of something funny, but it is based on a series of easy-to-do exercises that include the act of laughter. Like other types of yoga, it supports our physical and mental well-being. One fascinating point that Dr Kataria makes is that for the body, there is no difference between 'pretend' or 'fake' laughter and real laughter. As long as the laughter

is deep or hard, it doesn't matter. After regularly attending a 'laughter gym', you begin to feel the physical and emotional benefits.

The benefits of laughter

Deep laughter causes our muscles to relax, which helps to cope with stress. During laughter our body releases chemicals that are associated with positive events and emotions. This can also reduce anxiety and physical pain. Like yoga, the physical act of laughter involves deep breathing. The oxygen flow throughout our body is increased, and when we breathe out, the 'old' air in our lungs is released. Mentally, laughter can help us feel more positive about life, ready to face challenges and deal with difficult situations more calmly. There are many free videos on different social media platforms with Dr Kataria but – warn your housemates or family members – you will probably laugh loudly and keep laughing!

Laughter as medicine? Maybe!

Some people think that deep laughter can help with the recovery from serious illness. Norman Cousins, a famous 20th-century writer, certainly believed this. In his late forties and following an extremely stressful time in his professional life, Cousins was diagnosed with a serious illness. He moved with difficulty, he was in constant pain and he was told he had a limited time to live.

However, Cousins thought that if stress or negative emotions had caused his illness, then maybe positive emotions could help him get better – and daily laughter became part of this approach. For months, from his sickbed, Cousins watched comedy films that made him laugh out loud. He became convinced that ten minutes of deep 'belly' laughter resulted in two hours of painless sleep, so decided to stop taking powerful painkillers and sleeping pills. Instead, he used laughter and high doses of Vitamin C to help his recovery. Amazingly, within six months he was up and about, and within two years back at work.

Whatever the case, if laughter helps us to cope with stress and makes us feel positive about life – then let's keep doing it!

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. People have celebrated World Laughter Day for over a quarter of a century.	True	False
2. Laughter events can involve thousands of people.	True	False
3. Laughter Yoga invites people to remember something that made them laugh.	True	False
4. In Laughter Yoga, it is important for the laughter to feel genuine.	True	False
5. Laughter has benefits for your mental health, particularly in times of stress.	True	False
6. If you pay a small fee, you can watch Dr Kataria's videos online.	True	False
7. Norman Cousins was told he had a life-threatening illness.	True	False
8. Cousins believed that laughter was the key to his pain relief and recovery.	True	False

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

attend	founded	release	diagnosed
	cope	gathered	face

- Dr Madan Kataria organised the first World Laughter Day and Laughter Yoga.
- On World Laughter Day in 2000, large numbers of people in central Copenhagen to laugh together.
- You start to feel benefits when you regularly a 'laughter gym'.
- Deep laughing causes our body to chemicals associated with positive emotions.
- Norman Cousins was with a serious illness.
- Laughter can help us with stress and difficult situations.

Discussion

Would you like to try Laughter Yoga? Why?/Why not?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. a
3. g
4. f
5. b
6. h
7. e
8. c

Task 1

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. False
7. True
8. True

Task 2

1. founded
2. gathered
3. attend
4. release
5. diagnosed
6. cope, face