

Becoming Joyful Through Laughter, Bells, Conducting, Dancing, Drumming and More!

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Introduction

In our fast paced world, we get too serious and stressed. In whole-person wellness, we look at how to integrate activities and events to benefit us in a more healthy way. We look at social, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and vocational components. There are many creative activities that integrate these components into wonderful wellness programs. This session will address inexpensive, simple and fun activities that are joyful, upbeat, creative and playful. Becoming playful is needed! As we mature from children to adults, we tend to get more inhibited. We don't take time to unleash stress. We need to release, let go, unwind, have fun.

There are multiple studies that prove laughter is the best medicine. Researchers have found that even thinking you're about to hear something funny, boosts your health.

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History of Laughter Yoga

In March 1995, Dr. Madan Kataria, a family physician from Mumbai, India, decided to write an article called “Laughter –the best medicine” for his monthly health magazine “My Family Doctor”. Decades of scientific research had already proven that laughter has been both a preventive and therapeutic effect. Dr. Kataria’s research included the findings of journalist Norman Cousins, dying from a degenerative disease in the 1960s, who healed himself completely using laughter as his main form of therapy.

Dr. Kataria also found that his morning laughter clubs in the park worked better without jokes. One person laughing was enough to get the whole group to laugh: laughter is contagious. He experimented with the idea of laughing for no reason and it worked very well.

The brain can’t distinguish self-induced laughter from the laughter from external stimuli, and what to some may seem like a silly and artificial beginning almost always leads into a natural euphoric state of hearty laughter

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History of Laughter Yoga continued

This branch of yoga is traditionally called Hasya Yoga (a Sanskrit name for Laughter Yoga). Dr. Mandan's wife Madhuri Kataria is a Yoga teacher and helped build upon the yoga connection of laughter. Together they designed a sequence of simple laughter exercises with gentle yoga breathing exercise (pranayama) for maximum benefits.

Since 1995, the idea of Laughter Clubs have grown into a worldwide movement of currently over 5000 Laughter Clubs in 53 countries. Laughter Yoga and Laughter Clubs have been featured in every media network around the world, and is referred to as the "latest exercise craze to hit the United States of America."

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How to Start a Laughter Session

The following are based on training from The American School of Laughter Yoga, which was founded in 2004 by Sebastien Gendry, the first American to train as a Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher with Dr. Kataria and is the oldest and biggest provider of Laughter Yoga education in N. America.

In a Laughter Session, we will exercise our laughter muscles. We will practice and repeat three different types of exercise and progressively add a lot of childlike playfulness into it. First we will clap, then we will take a deep breath, then we will laugh.

In the laughter section please keep the following 5 important things in mind:

- **No New Pain**
- **Fake is Fine**
- **Maintain Eye Contact**
- **Please Refrain From Talking**
- **Act Happy and Energetic!**

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The Laughter Yoga Method

1. Clap in rhythm while chanting “ho ho ha ha ha” (slow slow, fast fast fast)

Seated or standing. This is different from regular clapping. Keep your palms in front of you facing one another, and aim to have full contact – fingers hit opposite fingers. Swing your hands left and right while clapping and chanting. Do it several times together. This warm-up exercise stimulates acupressure points on the palms and improves blood circulation in the whole body. It helps to bring a sense of well-being and builds energy levels. Put on a smile while doing it. If standing, keep moving and meeting different people and maintain eye contact. Variations include chanting and clapping to someone else’s hands, as a fun, safe ice breaker. Clap 1-2/ho ho on your own, and then 1-2-3/ha ha ha together. Try reversing if the rhythm is difficult (clap together ho ho, on your own ha ha ha). Other variations could include clapping hands then tapping your chest, or different sides of your body.

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The Laughter Yoga Method

2. Breathing

This exercise helps to bring about physical and mental relaxation. It provides a break and helps avoid exertion and tiredness. The basic movement is to breathe in and smile as you lift your arms up, and breathe out as your arms go down and relax. Try it together several times. You can breathe through your mouth or nose. The goal is to consciously deepen your breath while staying in a comfortable range of motion. Variations include holding breath longer while smiling and releasing breath slower. Laugh once you have reached the end of your exhalation to completely empty your lungs. You can combine slow breathing with movements like walking like a dinosaur, flying like a bird, etc. You can add healing words to the movement, such as inhale to “forgive, live, love, we care” and exhale to “forget, let live, be loved, we serve”.

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The Laughter Yoga Method

3. Laugh

This is the best part, and is where the creative input gets unleashed. There are 3 types of laughter exercises.

1. Yoga Laughter Techniques: These are developed from different yoga postures for physical well-being. The most famous yogic laughter techniques first devised by Dr. Kataria include:

- **Gradient Laughter:** start with bringing a smile, slowly add gentle giggles and increase the intensity of your laughter. Burst into hearty laughter and slowly and gradually let it slow down and stop.
- **Hearty Laughter:** spread your arms up, pointed to the sky and tilt head back, chin raised. Laugh heartily at heavens above, visualize and try to feel your laughter coming straight from your heart.
- **Humming Laughter:** keeping mouth closed start humming and let it turn into laughter.
- **Lion Laughter:** extend your tongue fully while keeping eyes wide open, stretch your hands out like the claws of a lion and laugh from your abdomen.

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- 2. Playful Laughter Techniques:** Laughter comes with playfulness. The more one plays, the more one gets disconnected from intellect/left brain/rational mind. No mind=no inhibitions, no fear, no ego=more playfulness=more laughter. Examples of playful laughter techniques include:
- **Age Laughter:** Imagine and voice your laugh sound twice your current age, 3 times, as a baby.
 - **Airwave Laughter:** spread fingers, put thumbs on forehead, scan environment for laughter airwaves.
 - **Driving Laughter:** drive imaginary car and laugh.
 - **Engine Laughter:** start your laughter engine in 4 laughs. Put key into ignition (ie. Belly button) and crank it with powerful HA!, then HA! HA! HA!, then aaaaaa HAHAHAH.
 - **Karate Kick Laughter:** hold both hands in front of your head, then hit the imaginary brick with your head saying a powerful HA! Then laugh and/or cry as if in great pain.

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The Laughter Yoga Method

3. **Value-based Laughter Techniques:** Exercises where we put ourselves into imaginary real-life challenging situations and replace negative responses with a positive one. Examples of value-based laughter techniques include:
- **Argument Laughter:** Express feelings. Argue, point fingers. The only rules are 1)you must laugh and smile the whole time and 2)you can't touch. Try arguing in gibberish (language with no meaning).
 - **Appreciation/Apology Laughter:** express appreciation/apologize to everybody and everything you see...laughing. No words. You can gently shake hands, hug, etc. Try it in gibberish for variety.
 - **Celebration Laughter:** everyone come close together and then tell them a secret or some insignificant statement and then give high fives and jump around as if it's the best news ever.
 - **Greeting Laughter:** greet in as many cultural styles and laugh instead of talking (shake hands, bow forward, do an army salute, etc).
 - **Hot Soup Laughter:** wave hands up and down in front of mouth as if hot and spicy soup and say: Hee...Hee...Hee.

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The Laughter Yoga Method

4. Play

Let go of the need to understand. “Playing” is just a different word for “being”. There is only one condition for this method to work: you have to be willing to try and physically go through the motions of happiness. Let your heart speak, give your mind a rest and you won’t regret it. Laughter yoga is a physical activity that involves virtually no intellectual ability. There is no humor, no joking, no comedy. There is nothing to understand or analyze. It only works by playfully “being” and moving around.

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How to End a Laughter Session

Laughter Meditation: This is the most pleasurable part of the laughter session.

- **Floor Laughter Exercises: (10-15 minutes).** Start with complete silence, stillness. Then fake laughter one last time. This is when people “let go” and truly laugh.
- **Grounding Techniques: (1-2minutes).** Try humming bee breath.

There is not right or wrong way of doing this. Experiment. The following works well after 30 minutes of laughter.

- **Group Prayer for Peace:** Invite all to lift their right arm up, palm facing up, and touch/reach for the floor with their left hand. Connect the heavens and the earth. Bring in harmony, healing, love, peace, strength, wisdom through your right hand, and send it out to the Earth through the left, and through the Earth to anybody anywhere where we feel it is needed.
- **Positive Affirmations:** Leader starts with one or two, such as: “We are amazing!” and then groups shouts a loud “YES!” after each one, thrusting arms in the air. Invite participants to give a positive affirmation, (and not being funny).
- **Feedback/Q & A/Announcements by participants**
- **Appreciation Moment:** Stand up, come close together and thank each other for being here (shake hands, hug, etc.)

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Important Reminders

Laughter Yoga is a unique form of simulated laughter exercises that is simple, good for you and a lot of fun. Here's how you can make the most of it:

Understand the Key Concept: Not entertainment, it is exercise. Don't try to tell jokes. Fake laughter is fine. Inspire all to laugh with others, not at them.

Follow and Repeat This Sequence: Getting any group to fake laughter is easy, getting them to connect with free flow laughter is an art. Follow the structure of:

- **Clap**
- **Deep-Breathe**
- **Laugh**

Maintain discipline: Talk to the group in general, no talking except the instructor, no jokes, keep eye contact, interact

Act happy and energetic: The spirit of joy is noisy! Fake it.

Remember that Laughter Yoga is not a substitute for proper medical consultation for physical, mental and psychological illnesses and may not be suitable for everyone. If experiencing discomfort while laughing, discontinue immediately. Please use your common sense: no strain, no new pain.

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Improv/Acting

Doing laughter yoga techniques includes some improvisation exercises! There are some retirement communities that have been lucky to acquire improvisation leaders from places like Second City in Chicago. You can also check with your local high school or college theatre department, and see if they could do some classes or sessions with mature adults. If you can't find an instructor, there are some scripted books in print for your use, and this can be less threatening. Readers Theatre is the dramatic reading of scripts, and doesn't require memorization. These can be done with props, costumes, or just in a simple seated set up. At a past job, the independent residents worked out many skits that they presented at nursing homes, senior centers, for church clubs, at talent shows and senior expos. They felt like a real drama troupe! In the resource section there will be several books available for purchase that work well.

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Bells

Bells are a great instrument for music expression and performing, adaptable to all levels of ability. There are color coded handbell and deskbell sets. Each note is identified with letter name and number for easy playing. A leader can also just point or tap the clients holding each bell. This can be successful for dementia/Alzheimer's clients.

For more advanced playing, chimes can be used with clients who can read music or follow a chart. With all these groups, bells/chimes can become a performance venue, and increase pride and self-esteem within the community.

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Conducting

David, Dworkin, A retired professional musician and conductor, put together a program “Conductorcise” that uses conducting motions for exercise. This is physical, fun, musical, educational and can be achieved quickly. You can get officially certified through the Conductorcise program, or you can find a staff, volunteer or senior client to lead this concept, at no cost. Anyone with a trained music education or music leadership background (singer, musician, band, orchestra, choral director) probably learned basic conducting in school at some point, and it’s not easily forgotten. Here are two conducting techniques that will work with almost any song:

- 1. Conducting in 2’s:** Start with one hand raised, index finger can be the pointer. Conducting starts at the top and goes down. Down, Up. 1, 2. Down, Up. 1, 2.
- 2. Conducting in 3’s:** Imagine drawing a triangle, starting with one hand raised at the top and go down at a slant, across, then back up at a slant. 1, 2, 3.

Now add the baton. Straws or chop sticks work perfectly! Add some “Top Classics” music and as a group figure if the music is in 2’s or 3’s and begin conducting to it. Add the other arm in mirroring motion. Bounce, jump, conduct in directions, etc. Have fun!

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Dance

Line Dance - One of the most fun ways to experience rhythm, improve balance, work the mind and body, and stay “current” to popular dance trends.

Conducting- If kept simple, participants move, appreciate beautiful music, feel like a director, have fun and experience fitness

Pole Dancing - This is fun, movement, a chance to feel like a performer or Rockette! Add pearls and plastic “top hats” and you’ve got a show!

Zumba Gold- May need to adapt to slower pace, but fun!

Line Dance Examples

Electric Slide: One of the older line dances, this is easily recognizable, and all ages will join in. To keep it simple, teach in rotations of 2: 2 steps to the right, 2 steps to the left, 2 steps back, knee bend and turn $\frac{1}{4}$ step to the left. Repeat.

Cupid Shuffle: Very popular with the teens, this will make for nice intergenerational dance. Keep it simple in rotations of 4: 4 steps to the right, 4 steps to the left, 4 steps of “heel” (right heel, left heel, right heel, left heel), and 4 steps of “boogying” (arms in air and shake body). Once they get this down, you can add a $\frac{1}{4}$ turn to the left. Repeat

Cha Cha Slide: Another popular dance with the teens. The narration on the CD will tell you what to do (clap, slide to the left/right/back, hop, and cha cha). Cha cha instruction: forward with right foot, back, cha cha cha.

Macarena: An oldie, but still fun. This one is easy to do seated as well. Right palm down, left palm down, right palm up, left palm up, right hand to left shoulder, left hand to right shoulder, open up hands and tap each shoulder, right hand to left hip, left hand to right hip, open up hands and tap each hip, hands in the air and shake them/boogie.

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Props

The use of props can be a great start into playfulness.

When exercising, include fun music CD's and switch it around frequently. Buy party tapes, "Best of" different decades and keep them wondering what you will play during exercise. One day have beach balls with Beach Boys, use colorful pompoms (cheapest at Dollar store), have bright scarves for cool down, add stress balls, ribbon wands, fly swatters, etc.

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Resources

By Sebastien Gendry, Director of the American School of Laughter Yoga. Go to www.laughangeles.com

Laughter Yoga 101, Laughter Yoga FUN damental companion handbook

The Laughter Yoga Deck, Dr. Madan Kataria

A Laugh and A Half, Bi-Folkal Productions

Almost Anything for a Laugh

40 Short Humorous Skits for Seniors, by Dirk Singerling

Skits for Seniors, Vol.1 & 2, by Jean Vetter

David Dworkin, www.conductorcise.com

Nasco Activity Catalog: 1-800-558-9595, www.eNASCO.com.

West Music, 1-800-397-9378, www.westmusic.com

Different Party Dance CD's (Drew's Famous, Big Band)

Instruments: Drums, bells, rhythm

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