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Mindful About Life

Focus, Flourish and Fly
using the science of positive psychology

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Do you laugh enough?

Do you laugh enough? What do you have to gain from laughing more?

A study about laughter was published in 2007 by Heidi Beckman and others. This study was not about humor but about laughter, so Dr. Beckman was looking just at the physical act of laughing, not the psychological effect of being amused. (You can have laughter all by itself without humor but a good joke is usually accompanied by laughter – or it wasn't so good!) Dr. Beckman's basic question was, "Does laughter make you feel better about your job?" What do you think? If you laughed more at work would you do better?

In Dr. Beckman's study she had 33 people who worked in a large mental health facility take part in a 3-week program. The first meeting was 45 minutes and then just 15 minutes each day. Think about that – just half your lunch break and you might have a totally different attitude toward work. Well, what happened?

The study showed that this 15-minute intervention helped people with self-regulation, motivation, optimism and assertiveness up to three months later. It wasn't just at the end of the program, these effects stuck around a good long time. Now, to be perfectly honest, I am not sure

all the benefits came from laughter. There were other aspects to the intervention including yoga, working with colleagues, feeling capable when they got it right and some humor from all the laughing so we cannot ascribe all the benefits to the physical act of laughing. But the bottom line is that the intervention of laughing is pretty simple, doesn't take much time and does have long lasting effects. And, like chicken soup, it certainly can't hurt!



One possible explanation for why this worked is that many, many people have a tendency to remember every mistake or negative interaction and keep replaying that. The fancy word for this is rumination and it may be the biggest problem that we humans have, in my opinion. I think the laughter helps us break that cycle.

Once we stop beating ourselves up we can start to flourish. This break from the negative thoughts can come from a good laugh, from meditation or from countless other positive psychology techniques.

Do you want to feel better? Do you want to feel better about work? Then have yourself a good belly laugh – and pass on that smile to someone else!

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