Fact: Preschool-aged children laugh up to 400 times a day, but by the time we reach adulthood, we only laugh about 17 times per day!

I don't know about you but when I read that statistic above, it makes me wonder why there is such a drop in laughter as we age. Is it because we begin to take life too seriously? Is it because our jobs and obligations begin to demand so much from us that we forget life is about living rather than just existing? Maybe it's because as we enter adulthood we want people to take us seriously; in the process we trade laughter and silliness for what we consider maturity and respect. Or, it could just be that we no longer have a Big Wheel or crayons or can sit and watch an episode of Barney without someone making fun of us. Who knows?
The answer may be a mystery but the significant benefits of laughter are not.

Did you know that when you make someone laugh that you very well may be helping them strengthen their immune system, reduce food cravings, or even increase their threshold for pain? There’s even an emerging field known as “humor therapy” that is helping patients heal more quickly after surgery. Laughter reduces the level of stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine, adrenaline, and dopamine. It also increases the level of health-enhancing hormones like endorphins, and neurotransmitters. Laughter has also been found to increase the number of antibody-producing cells and enhances the effectiveness of T cells within the body. All this creates a stronger immune system and better ability to ward off the effects of daily stress.

A good laugh also exercises the diaphragm, contracts the abs and even works out the shoulders, leaving muscles more relaxed afterward. Some research suggests it even provides a good workout for the heart.

Laughter shifts our focus away from anger, guilt, stress, and negative emotions that can create more discomfort and stress within our lives. Laughter is contagious. If you bring more laughter into your life, you will not only help others around you to laugh more, but you will realize these same healthy benefits yourself.

So it seems that laughter really is the best medicine but how do we increase our dosage? Here are a few ideas…

**Start with a shift in your perception.** Studies show that our response to stressful events can be altered by whether we view something as a “threat” or a “challenge.” Humor can give us a more lighthearted perspective and help us view events as “challenges,” making them less threatening and more positive. The next time you are faced with what seems to be a roadblock in life (a threat), don’t get upset—becoming bitter and resentful—instead look at it as an opportunity to detour around it (a challenge). Sure, it may take a little more time but that detour
may have something in store for you that you never dreamed possible.

**Slow down.** Regardless of how much we try, humans are not machines. Slowing down and spending time with others is vital to bringing more laughter into our lives. We can’t make someone laugh if we don’t take the time to engage them or genuinely care about them. Take a few minutes each day and when you pass a co-worker in the hall or even some stranger at the store...say hello and pay them a compliment. As you rush through your day, remember to also take time for those who serve you. The drycleaner, the waiter, the waitress, the clerk...use each interaction as a way to try and make someone else’s day instead of expecting them to make yours!

**Tell a joke.** Here’s a good clean one from my 5-year-old:

Q: Why did the cookie go to the doctor?
A: He felt crummy.

**Say “Thank you” by sending someone an electronic thank-you card.** Greeting card web sites make it easy to send someone a note just to say “thanks”...maybe for no reason at all other than for being a part of your life.

**This week, be encouraged to laugh like a child.** Make someone laugh and know that their laughter is not only making them feel good but improving their health (and yours as well).

For more tips visit [www.GiftofKindness.com](http://www.GiftofKindness.com)

If you have jokes or ideas to help others create more laughter and joy in their lives, email your comments to Daniel@GiftOfKindness.com