

What Is "Laughter Yoga"?

by Wendy Woods, Certified Laughter Leader

There is a new kind of yoga that's catching on.

It's quick, easy and anyone can participate. Unlike other yogas, it doesn't require a yoga mat, downward dog or, luckily, any spandex. All you need is to breathe, stretch, and laugh. It's mainly about laughing - that's why it's called laughter yoga.

What gets the laughter started? Actually you laugh for no reason. There are no jokes, funny pictures or silly faces. You simply laugh through a series of laughter exercises.

Before you think that men in white coats will

take you away for laughing for no reason, let me explain. While writing an article on laughter for a health magazine, Dr Madan Kataria found scientific evidence on the many benefits of laughter. He thought: if laughter is so good for us, then why not start a laughter club? The next day he went to a Mumbai park and asked people to join his club. Many rejected his offer, however he did get four people to join him. That was in 1995 and now in 2006 there are 5,000 laughter clubs worldwide.

Initially that first group laughed at jokes. But within two weeks they ran out of clean ones so Dr. Kataria realized that they couldn't rely on joke telling. He believed that the body couldn't tell the difference between real and fake laughter yet the benefits still remained. He also felt that if people gathered in groups the laughter would be contagious and, in time, become genuine. The idea of laughter yogas "fake it until you make it" approach was born.

Regardless of whether the laughter starts out fake or not, laughing has many benefits.

It's the perfect stress buster guaranteed to give immediate relief. In fact, Milton Berle said it best "Laughter is an instant vacation". Laughing energizes the body through better blood and oxygen flow. It also brings people together highlighting similarities and improving relationships.

Where does the yoga come in? The yogic part of laughter yoga is in the breathing and stretching. It is also designed to link mind, body, and spirit.

Find out why the whole world is laughing. Give laughter yoga a try. The worst that can happen is you have one heck of a great time.



Wendy Woods is a certified laughter yoga leader who has developed unique programs to bring laughter into the workplace. For more information, please contact her at wwoods@watershedtraining.ca or visit www.laughter-yoga.ca.