Laugh Out Loud: A Fun Approach To Better Heart Health Transcript

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Introduction to laughter and heart health

Welcome back to the Reversing Heart Disease Summit. I'm super excited to be here with another episode. And, I'm super excited to be co-hosting this with Joel Kohn.

I'm Doctor Rita moreno Scalzo, and today's guest and I are going to talk about a topic that nobody else is talking about in this summit. And that is the role of laughter in helping us protect ourselves and even reversing heart disease.

So without further ado, Jennifer Swank. She is a health coach. She is one of our graduates from our nutritional endocrinology practitioner training. She's in PhD and UN.

She is just passionate about using natural means foods and, you know, balancing the stress levels that we all have in this world to regain health. So, Jennifer, thank you so much for being here with us today.

Thank you so much, Doctor Eater Marie, for inviting me. I'm so excited to be here to talk about laughter. It's my passion to, spread laughter, to the world, to those, around us.

And it's not something that people actually feel that comfortable doing. It's surprisingly so. Eight. Right? Surprisingly so. So I've been with you, and you've taught classes in this and people you know are like a little on edge beforehand.

So before we jump into the how it works and all that, I want to start with because this is the heart disease reversing heart disease summit. What the heck does laughter have to do with our heart health?

Well, you know, laughter is part of the our human behavior, right? And it is regulated by the brain which affects our heart. And so there's actually a rhythmic contraction that occurs in our diaphragm, when we laugh and we, crinkle our eyes and our facial expressions change our lip can quiver.

And when that happens, we there's an intake of oxygen, and at the same time, there's a gasp, and then there's noises, and it can be anywhere from silence.

Right? To a little giggle. You a big like guffaw. And what that what is happening then is that we're getting 25% more oxygen into our bodies or increasing our oxygen intake, which, is improving our blood flow.

And that then reduces our blood pressure, is drinks, it strengthens the blood vessels. Right. And then because of all that, that can help prevent cardiac failure, it can boost our immune system.

How laughter affects oxygen, blood flow, and neurochemistry

It improves, you know, our mood reduces pain, all these things, and it relaxes the body. Right? So all these things can occur. How can all these things occur with laughing?

Right. But they do. Well okay. So lowering blood pressure is one thing we hear a lot. And we've been talking a lot throughout this summit. On the importance of keeping blood pressure steady and the importance of oxygenation to the tissues.

Are there any other, like biochemical type shifts that we have, like, we were talking about breathing the other day and we talked about nitric oxide increases when we breathe properly.

It decreases when we don't breathe properly. So I would guess that laughter improves our breath and can also

have some of those same benefits. Exactly.

So as we're like laughing when we're laughing, we're getting in that 25% more oxygen into the the body as we're laughing out. Right. And with laughter yoga, it's not just laughing.

So it, combines laughing. What you hear. Laughter is the best medicine, but really the best medicine is laughter and meditation. Right? And with meditation comes breathing.

And with yoga, it's not the US not poses that we're doing. It's the breathing. Right? So we go from switching to laughing, laughing to breathing. So you're laughing when you're laughing, that's stimulating.

The heart, the lungs, the muscles, it increases the endorphins. It's, we're getting, neurochemicals from the brain, so the brain's like, oh, I'm. I'm happy.

And the brain doesn't know the difference between real laughter and fake laughter. Right? So you don't have to be happy. Just like when I was talking about that.

That, like the crinkling of the eyes and the facial expression. So, like, we get a dose of neurochemicals so that dopamine. Right. That helps us get motivated to do the things that we want to do in our life.

Oxytocin, that cuddle chemical, the love hormone, that gets released, serotonin, which we need for all the cells in our body. And it helps us ward off against anxiety and depression.

So I will tell people, put your serotonin smiles on and wrap them from one ear over to the other. Right. Put your smile on. That's signaling the brain right along with the laughing.

To start releasing these neurochemicals, along with endorphins, the body's natural painkiller. What makes us feel like good. Right. So those are all the biochemical things that, you know, really are occurring, and it's and the and it's the brain, right.

Where the laughter is, is like, switch to the brain to send those neurochemicals to the body. And when it does, then it's sending good things throughout the body versus when we're sad. It like, if we were to sit here and we were to put a frown on our face and you would like, be all crunched in gravity, right?

It doesn't feel good. Very good. You put a smile on your face, you lift your shoulders up, back and down. You pull them up and you open up your heart.

You're expanding your heart. And if you lift your arms above your head. Right. And, gratitude. Right. Feeling gratitude for around you. Feeling joy. Right?

Whether you really are feeling that or not, it's your body is is is reacting to that. I love it. I love it because we so many things we talk about with health overall, especially cardiac health, we're looking at so I love hearing this because when we talk about heart health or any kind of health in the body, there's always things that people think, oh, it's so hard.

I have to change my diet, I have to exercise, I have to meditate, I have to give up all the things I love just to get healthy. And, you know, we know that it's got to be important.

It's important because this is our body and we want our life and we want to enjoy it. But what you're saying is that we can use laughter even if it's a fake it til you make it, to stimulate these chemical centers in our brain, to lower our blood pressure and do all these wonderful things, which I love hearing.

And you mentioned a couple of times laughter, yoga, yoga. So for people who don't know what laughter yoga is, can you give us a little explanation? Sure, I'd love to.

So laughter yoga was started in 1995 by Doctor Kataria in Mumbai, India. With just five people in a park. Five people showed up and then, and they started by telling jokes and, you know, stories and stuff like that.

But then after a little bit, some of the jokes weren't that funny to some people. So, so then then we're like, how can we do this so that we're not relying on on that?

So they came up with laughter exercises. So they're usually 2 to 3 minutes long each laughter exercise.

What laughter yoga is and how it works

And they're full that the exercise is followed with, clapping the hands to the right and to the left and lifting them overhead and then going, very good, very good. Yay!

And you do it twice. Very good, very good. Yay! And it feels so good to do that, right. When you're lifting your hands above your head, that's when you're joyful, right?

And then you're mimicking child play. So children laugh like 100 times a day. And adults, if they laugh ten times a day. And you'd be surprised, when when you do that, when you stimulate those acupressure points, you're getting that dose of neurochemicals that's coming out.

It's also crossing the brain. It's crossing the body from one side to the other. So it's activating neural pathways in the brain, which is very important.

And we want to make sure that the laughter is sustained. Also, like when you hear laughter and a joke. Right. It's like for 10s. But we want laughter to be sustained for like 15 minutes.

That doesn't mean we're laughing constantly for 15 minutes, but that with these exercises, right. So usually most laughter yoga, clubs are they'll, they'll have a session that's about 30 minutes long and that includes laughter exercise and the breathing exercises.

Because remember I mentioned a little earlier that not that laughter is not just the best medicine, but also that learning how to breathe, right. Breathe deeply because the one thing that we can do right for our heart, the best thing we can do for our heart, is to let go of stress, to breathe deeply.

Because as we let go of that stress, then that relieves, tension in the body, right? It relaxes the muscles. It activates our parasympathetic nervous system, which is our rest, digest and heal system.

It reduces our cortisol levels and, and it improves our cardiac health. Well. And and it's not hard. Right. And anybody can do it. Anybody can do it. And we naturally do it when we hear something funny or when we see a kid doing some, you know, thing.

And so for those who are surrounded by kids and or watching comedies and are working hard and really worried about their heart because maybe they had a near miss, you know, or a heart attack or stroke or have family members who have and they're, you know, as they age, they're starting get scared about that.

How do we incorporate this short of going to a laughter yoga class right now. I don't want to go to a class. But we do this. So, we do this by creating positive thoughts with it within our day.

Smiling. Right? Just start by smiling. Put something on your phone once an hour to smile or even better, to laugh. But if smiling, see what you're starting.

If you can't even smile right? Do you put that you put a smile on right? Hold it for 20s. That's the best way. The next step is to, laugh, right? Or sing or dance.

Because when we move our bodies motion, it creates emotion. So it's easier to feel more uplifted and even laugh if

you're like, dancing or if you're singing.

Right. And the components of joy are singing, dancing, laughing and acting like small children. And that was where that clapping, right? Clapping your hands, stimulating those acupressure points.

Right. So those are like that. And anybody can do it. You can set something on your phone every time you, you know, we're supposed to get up right for our heart and move every 30 minutes.

So getting up and walking, you know, to, you know, to another room or going outside, which is even better, right? Taking a, you know, break and going outside and, being out in nature, do a little giggle.

You know, obviously time. Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, we we all many, most people have probably heard of, cousins book on laughter is the best medicine and watching comedies and curing cancer curing.

We can't use that word really. But, you know, turning his cancer around by using laughter as medicine. Right. You know that this is there's there's science base to it.

And I like your connection to the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system, to the neurotransmitters, the dopamine and the serotonin and all. So I like what you said at the beginning, and I want to elaborate on that.

You said the brain doesn't know the difference, right? If you're sad, you're sad because of whatever. You're stressed because of whatever whatever the climate is your economic situation, your family situation, and you're sad and you pretend to be happy by putting on a happy face and giggling or whatever.

How does that affect the nervous system?

Simple ways to practice laughter daily

Do we have to really actually feel it is what I'm saying because a lot of people say, well, I'm sad, I'm depressed, I have no money coming in, I have this, and how can I be happy?

That's when we need it the most, right? So practicing these tools, right, the deep breathing, right breathing and calming down our, our system. Right.

And laughing. They're they're is they, they're easy to do, but sometimes it feels difficult. And you can start, also by doing silent laughter. So, Doctor Kataria that I told you about who started laughter yoga.

He gets up at 430 every morning and he practices laughter yoga. But the rest of his family is asleep, right? So he doesn't want to wake them up. So he does silent laughter and he will.

He breathes in and then he laughs out. Okay. Silently. Right. So you want to and we we want this, laughter to be deep. Right. So we a lot of times when we're stressed out, we breathe from our chest, but we want to breathe from our belly.

So we all breathe in. Breathe into your chest and your diaphragm in your belly. And you can feel your belly expand if you put your hand there and then you when you laugh out, you laugh out like this as well.

Right. But if you're not ready to do that, you can also do some hoho haha laughter which would be clapping your hands like oh, whoa ha ha ho! Haha. Oh so that's that's mimicking the laughter.

You're just doing a ho ho ha ha. You're clapping us, simulating the the, hands and, another, one that I like, to tell people that you can do you can laugh while you're driving, right?

Because it's stressful driving. Right? There's drivers cutting you off. There's, you know, stop and go traffic. There's a lot going on out there. And so, you know, sometimes bad words can come from the mouth, but you can instead

just go, right. And you can do that. Laughter.

So you could do ha ha ha ha. You can do a hee hee hee hee. You can do a high high high high. Ho ho ho ho and, Hoo hoo hoo hoo! Right. So those are those are also ways that you can you can practice, you know, laughter yoga, or just laughing.

Right? It doesn't have to be laughter yoga. It's laughing. But, the thing is laughing and then taking some deep breathing, the those are the two and I mentioned.

So we want it to be, you know, sustained for a period of time. Right. So if we only do it for a minute. So if you're not laughing at all, right, then you can start a minute, a day to a minute a day, right.

And then move it up to two minutes a day and then three minutes. The nice thing about being in a laughter yoga club and if you look up, Laughter Yoga international.org, there's a list of laughter yoga clubs all around the world.

So there's, you know, there's laughter yoga clubs in more than 100 countries. There's like more than a thousand laughter yoga clubs. There's some online and there's some in person.

Now, the first time I taught laughter yoga in person was at, Doctor Rita Morris shine event. And when everyone started laughing, I almost jumped out of my shoes because I was used to a zoom and there was a delay, right?

So it if you can do it in person, it's amazing, right? But we don't we don't all have that. You know, ability or you know, it's easier. So we we do what's best.

And if it seems weird if laughing laughter seems weird to you and it just doesn't feel right, that's okay. That's that's our first perception, of things is a lot of times it's negative.

Right? But we're with Laughter Yoga. We are able to change how we think about things. Just laughing, gives us a more positive perspective on things. And when we are in a more positive mindset, we feel happier, right?

So we feel better and we can heal quickly. Our heart is happier when we're when when we have all those positive, you know, neurochemicals going around when we're sad and we don't.

And, some people will say, well, there's so much going on the world, I shouldn't laugh because it this is serious, right? But this is the time when we need to laugh, because by putting a smile on your face, by laughing, you're more likely to go out into the world and smile at someone else.

And someone who's having a bad day can see your smile. And it really can change their day, right? And we don't think about that. We don't think about, what we're projecting out into the world.

But when we, when you see someone and they're smiling, it makes you feel better than when you see someone who's, you know, it is not right. And it's contagious.

Laughter is contagious, right? If you've ever been to any kind of comedy club or a funny movie and somebody starts laughing and all of a sudden everybody's bursting out laughing and going back to the heart because it's so important for people to realize this is a simple thing that you can incorporate into your day to day.

We're not asking you to go out and throw away all the food in your cupboard, which probably is a good idea too, but we'll talk about that on another section.

But it's just an easy starting point to create that parasympathetic, that lack of stress, the place where everything heals.

Personal stories and benefits from laughter yoga

And so if you already have some damage going on to your cardiovascular system, it's incorporating chemicals that are going to help it to heal. So I would love to hear all of you here if you have any stories to tell us.

Any people you've worked with, where you've helped them to reverse, you know, ideally, or lowering their blood pressure or, you know, other things that are risk factors for heart disease.

So the my favorite one has to do with my mom. So when I first introduced laughter yoga to my mom, she was sitting on a couch with my aunt and I, and my aunt was like, oh, okay, I get this.

And my mom was like, this is weird. I don't like it at all. So of course then I was like, okay, let's try it again. And then next time she was like, okay, it's a little better.

And then I started my laughter yoga club. I invited her to come and, she did, you know, because she's my mom, she's like, all right, I'll I'll come. Right. You know, because I want to support you.

But she's my biggest proponent now because within a month, her blood pressure had gone almost all the way back to normal. And her doctor, actually, reduced her blood pressure medication in half with.

And it was like two, you know, it was a short period of time, actually. And she's now like, I, in my laughter yoga club, it's like Monday through Friday and I don't do the weekends.

And she's like, I just wish you would do every day, right? So she can see the difference that has made in her. And actually, so can everyone in my family, because, we can see she has a more positive mindset and even her grandchildren are calling her, you know, up, you know, like, they can see, what a difference, that has made.

And so that that's my favorite for, for her health. And then I, I, I had a lot of, people in the Laughter Yoga club give me, like, their testimonials.

You know how how it made them feel. And I kind of wrote them down right here. So they were saying, it puts them in a better frame of mind. So once you start, it will change your life.

It starts each day on a wonderful note. Laughter yoga is a positive attitude adjustment. We can't change the situation, but we can change our attitude.

And, and then finally, it changes our frame of mind. And then I wanted to actually share what, you know, when I first started doing laughter yoga, I was kind of the same way, like I saw a YouTube video and I'm like, okay.

And I think I was doing the dishes when I put it on, like it was doing the dishes, and I was kind of listening and blah, blah, blah, and I wasn't really doing all the exercises and I'm like, yeah, it's kind of, I don't know, it's not really for me. Right.

And then but I knew how good it was. And then we were driving to Oregon, coming back from Washington to California, and there was fire all around. All around. The smoke was so thick with air.

I had like a, N95 mask on, you know, that was is, you know, rated for fire. I could barely breathe. Eyes were watering. I felt this doom and gloom, and I didn't feel safe.

Right. And, I decided to put that same laughter yoga YouTube on. I had my iPad, I put it on, and I did every laughter exercise like they, you know, said I did all the breathing exercises and at the end, the doom and gloom was gone, right?

There was still fire all around. I was still in the same situation. I still could, you know, the air was still thick with smoke, but I, I felt like everything was going to be okay.

I didn't feel like the world was crashing in on me. And I'm like, at that point I'm like, sign me up. Yeah, I'm I'm into

this. And so, it's the same. It's the same thing for for our heart. Right.

We can use this tool. It's a tool that we can use. It's with us everywhere we go. We don't have to pick up some exercise equipment. We don't have to go outside.

If the weather is inclement, we can do it. We can do it in the car. Right? Yeah. And so, that's what the thing I love about it, and I've just seen so many changes and people who do it, and the people who come to laughter yoga once they see how this makes them feel, they come every day.

They're like, they're in the like, we're not going to leave this to chance, right? We know that this helps us and it helps us every day. It helps our mindset.

It helps start our day on a good note and it's amazing to see, how people change. So I'm just going to throw in there if you are struggling, if you're listening to this hard summit, you're either here because you already have had some sort of cardiovascular incident.

You have a family history of it that you're trying to prevent, or you're just like super proactive about your health and you want to be the healthiest who you can.

So I'd encourage you to look into starting your day with laughter. Check out a class. Check out Jennifer. All of our information is on our on her page.

Check out one of her classes. You're still free, right? You still do them. They're still free. And then we also, Jennifer and what? Maya and I, we have a membership called the Gen twins, and it's the Zen.

And that's the zone where we will have a longer class once a month. That's on, like, a Saturday. And then our membership is paid, but the. But the laughter Yoga Club is free for everybody.

Closing thoughts and invitation to try laughter yoga

And you, whether you're six months old or 100 years old, you can, you can, you can come. Yeah. And I love the story about your mom getting your blood pressure under control because of course we know.

But high blood pressure is one of the leading causes of cardiovascular disease. And it doesn't have to be dropped down by medication. Right. The simple process.

Try it. It's worth a try. So if you're going to try it, test your blood sugar blood pressure. Go ahead and do it. And then test it again and see what happens after you do it consistently for a couple of weeks.

So Jennifer, thank you so, so much for being here. And if people want to check out the Laughter Yoga Club, you can go on to her page that we have her bio and everything about her and check it out and give it a try.

Or just look up laughter yoga and just start making a point of laughing for a minute a day. So thank you so much for being here, and I look forward to all of you on the next episode. Bye for now.