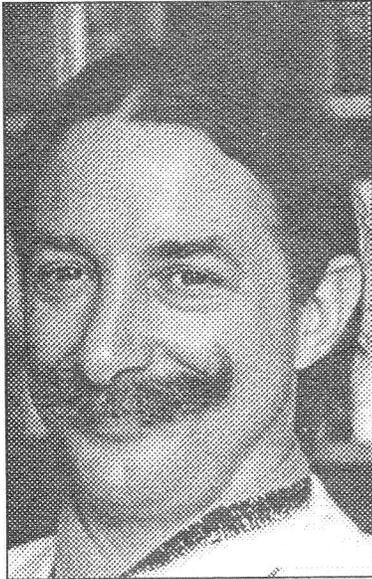


# YOGA RESEARCH

The Yoga Research Society Newsletter Vol. 3, No. 9 November 1993 – January 1994

## Humor and Healing



Dr. Hunter "Patch" Adams

*The arrival of a good clown exercises more beneficial influence upon the health of a town than of twenty asses laden with drugs.*

Dr. Thomas Sydenham  
seventeenth-century physician

Humor is an antidote to all ills. I believe that fun is as important as love. The bottom line, when you ask people what they like about life, is the fun they have, whether it's racing cars, dancing, gardening, golf, or writing books.

Anyone who has picked up a copy of Reader's Digest in the last forty years knows that laughter is the best medicine. In spite of the empirical nature of this truth, the mainstream medical literature hasn't refuted it, as far as I know.

The late Norman Cousins wrote eloquently about having laughed

himself back to health after suffering from a serious chronic disease.

Jokes seemed so important to Sigmund Freud that he wrote a book on the subject.

But we don't need professionals to tell us about the magnetism of laughter. With great insight, we call a funny person "the life of the party."

Humor has been strongly promoted as health-giving throughout medical history, from Hippocrates to Sir William Osler. People crave laughter as if it were an essential amino acid.

Although humor itself is difficult to evaluate, the response to humor (laughter) can be studied quite readily.

Research has shown that laughter increases the secretion of the natural chemicals, catecholamines and endorphins, that make people feel so peppy and good. It also decreases cortisol secretion and lowers the sedimentation rate, which implies a stimulated immune response.

Oxygenation of the blood increases, and residual air in the lungs decreases. Heart rate initially speeds up and blood pressure rises; then the arteries relax, causing heart rate and blood pressure to lower. Skin temperature rises as a result of increased peripheral circulation. Thus, laughter appears to have a positive effect on many

cardiovascular and respiratory problems.

In addition, laughter has superb muscle relaxant qualities. Muscle physiologists have shown that anxiety and muscle relaxation cannot occur at the same time and that the relaxation response after a hearty laugh can last up to forty-five minutes!

Psychologically, humor forms the foundation of good mental health. Certainly the lack of a good sense of humor indicates underlying problems like depression and alienation.

I have reached the conclusion that humor is vital in healing the problems of individuals, communities, and societies.

I have been a street clown for thirty years and have tried to make my own life silly, not as that word is currently used, but in terms of its original meaning. "Silly" originally meant good, happy, blessed, fortunate, kind, and cheerful in many different languages. No other attribute has been more important. Wearing a rubber nose wherever I go has changed my life.

excerpted from **GESUNDHEIT!**  
by Patch Adams, M.D., Healing Arts  
Press, Rochester, Vermont

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are Dr. Diet, Dr. Quiet, and  
Dr. Merryman."*

Jonathan Swift



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