

nounced that a little laughter around the dinner table might help people with Type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease. Subjects in the small study, published in the journal *Diabetes Care*, had less of a spike in post-meal blood sugar levels after watching a Japanese comedy show than when they listened to a monotonous lecture. Keeping blood sugar levels in check is key to staving off diabetes-related complications such as kidney failure and blindness.

Another Japanese study suggests that comedy might give Claritin a run for its money. Patients allergic to dust mites and other common irritants saw their skin welts temporar-

ily shrink after watching Charlie Chaplin's comedy classic *Modern Times*. (A video of weather information had no effect whatsoever.)

Oh, Lighten Up!

Turns out that being able to laugh at yourself—or at least being able to see humor in difficult situations—may help your ticker too. At an American Heart Association meeting in November 2000, University of Maryland Medical Center cardiologists presented research suggesting that laughter may be a buffer against heart attacks.

The researchers asked 300 people, half of whom had heart disease, a long list of “what if” questions. What if they arrived at a party wearing exactly the



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BUT **SERIOUSLY**, FOLKS ...

same outfit as someone else there, would they be able to laugh it off? What if the waiter spilled a drink on them at a meal out with friends?

The investigators found that people with heart disease were 40 percent less likely to see the humor in life's everyday absurdities than were people the same age with healthy hearts.

Of course, the findings could mean nothing more than that heart disease is hazardous to a sense of humor. But researchers theorized that laughter might protect against stress and the inflammatory changes that can injure the outer lining of our blood vessels.

“We know that exercising, not smoking, and eating foods low in saturated fat will reduce the risk of heart disease,” says cardiologist Michael

Miller, who led the study. “Perhaps regular, hearty laughter should be added to the list.”

That would be fine by Lee Berk, associate professor of health promotion and education at Loma Linda University in California and a prominent humor researcher, who keeps jokes plastered all over the walls of his office and home.

Berk has been investigating the health effects of humor since the early '80s. In one study, he and other researchers followed two groups of heart attack patients for one year in their cardiac rehabilitation programs.

While both groups continued their normal medications, the group that got to



Airplane! (1980)

The ultimate send-up of the disaster genre. The directors/writers Jim Abrahams and the brothers Jerry and David Zucker provide an avalanche of visual gags, parodies and groan-inducing puns. (“Surely you can’t be serious.” “I am serious, and don’t call me Shirley.”) Don’t like that joke? Wait ten seconds and there’ll be a new one. With Robert Hays as a failed pilot, Julie Hagerty as a flighty flight attendant, and a grand cast of poker-faced stiff, including Leslie Nielsen, Lloyd Bridges and Robert Stack.

Tootsie (1982)

A self-centered actor (Dustin Hoffman) can’t land a job—the only parts available are for women. So he dresses as one, gets a soap opera part, learns how the other half lives and becomes a better man/woman for having done so. Smart direction by Sydney Pollack (who also plays an agent) stresses credibility and gets laughs. So do Bill Murray, Teri Garr, Jessica Lange and Dabney Coleman.

Trading Places (1983)

The title represents truth in labeling. Eddie Murphy, a streetwise African

American hustler, exchanges jobs with Dan Aykroyd, a very proper Philadelphia stockbroker. The results are everything you’d expect from these two—and more. John Landis directed.

Ghostbusters (1984)

House haunted? Then hire Dan Aykroyd and Bill Murray, who know how to dispel ghosts and dispense jokes. So do Sigourney Weaver, Harold Ramis, Rick Moranis and director Ivan Reitman.