

Smile, It's Good For You!

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones." Proverbs 17:22

By Garry W. Johnson,
MOUNTAIN REVIEW Staff

Two studies at the University of Maryland have confirmed the Biblical prescription: happiness is good medicine.

Dr. Michael Miller and colleagues tested the function of blood vessels of twenty healthy volunteers as they viewed two movies, one humorous and one stressful. They focused primarily on the lining of the blood vessels where hardening of the arteries begins. Fourteen of the twenty subjects had diminished blood flow after watching the stressful movie clips. During those stressful periods blood flow was decreased by an average of 35 percent. The humorous movies had the opposite effect. Nineteen of the twenty subjects had increased blood flow while laughing at the funnier movie clips, an average increase of 22 percent.

In a report on the study Dr. Miller said, "the magnitude of change we saw in the endothelium [the lining of the blood vessels] is similar to the benefit we might see with aerobic activity, but without the aches, pains and muscle tension associated with exercise." However, he warns, "We don't recommend that you laugh and not exercise, but we do recommend that you try to laugh on a regular basis." Dr. Miller believes, "Thirty minutes of exercise three times a week, and fifteen minutes of laughter on a daily basis is probably good for the vascular system." He also explained, "Laughing may be important to maintain a healthy endothelium, and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease."

In the second study, Dr. Wei Jiang and colleagues at North Carolina's Duke University, tracked 1,005 heart failure patients and tested them for depression. Excluding other factors such as age,

marital status and original cause of the patients' heart failure, Dr. Jiang reported that patients with mild depression were at 44 percent greater risk of dying. He noted that patients experiencing depression were more likely not to exercise or not take medication properly and make unhealthy lifestyle choices in diet and smoking (*The Good News* magazine, p.15, July/August 2005).

Other medical studies featured in *The Philadelphia Trumpet* (August 2005, p.25), show that laughter actually boost endorphin levels (the body's natural pain killers) and increases the production of T-cells, which help to ward off viruses. Laughter also suppresses the body's level of epinephrine, the "stress" hormone.

The immune system also gets a boost as humor increases levels of antibody immunoglobulin, which fights upper respiratory tract infections. Laughter helps antibodies penetrate infected cells and helps lower dopamine levels (which are associated with high blood pressure).

As implied by Dr. Miller's study, laughter is considered a great cardiovascular workout. It lowers your heart rate, blood pressure and improves coordination of the brain (stimulating alertness and memory). It is actually possible for all 400 muscles of the body to move during a good hard belly-laugh!

So remember that laughter is good medicine and smile, because God loves you! (Sources: *The Good News*, *The Philadelphia Trumpet*). ■

