



Joanne Turner

Diabetic Living's resident dietitian and exercise physiologist points out the hidden carbohydrates in your diet in her story, *Hidden carbs quiz* (page 26). "Lots of my clients think they're following what they believe is a healthy diet and are confused about why they can't maintain good blood glucose levels," says Joanne. "When I show them where the carbs are hiding in their diet, they're most grateful to discover that by just making educated choices, they can still socialise and enjoy their food."

Dr William Sukala

Exercise physiologist Dr William Sukala has a serious side when it comes to writing about diabetes, but approaches life with great dollops of good humour. And it's a philosophy that can, literally, improve your health, as he shows in *Let's laugh for better health* (page 52). "I stumbled upon a laughter yoga class one day and thought it was a hoot! I then researched the connection between laughter and health and realised the world needed to know about it," he says. Dr Sukala applies this approach on his website, www.drbillofhealth.com.



Paula Goodyer

We asked award-winning health writer Paula Goodyer to find out why some people's tastebuds disappear over time (see page 40). "Researching this story reminded me of how easy it is to be sucked into eating too many processed foods due to the 'more-ish' flavours created by so much extra salt and sugar," says Paula. "In my experience, using natural flavour enhancers is key to sticking with a healthy diet. My favourites? Chilli and lemon zest – great in everything from curries and stir-fries to salads and soups."

Stephanie Osfield

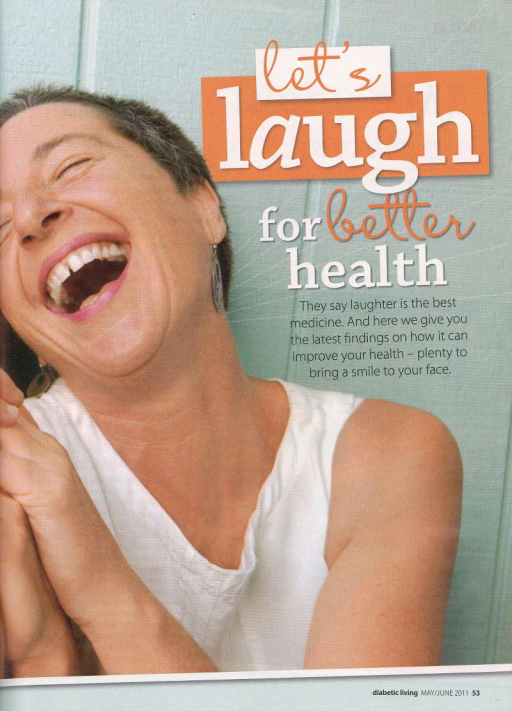
Diabetes can create all manner of social minefields. For instance, how do you respond, say, when a well-meaning colleague makes unwelcome comments about the food choices you make? Health journalist Stephanie Osfield learned how to rebut unsolicited advice in her story, *Have your say the right way* (page 58). "This story has taught me a great deal about how to negotiate these situations and make a firm and calm comeback, rather than taking it on the chin and seething silently," says Stephanie.



Dr Kate Marsh

Inspired by the bestseller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen Covey, Dr Kate Marsh applies this concept to finding a winning formula for good diabetes management in her story, *7 healthy habits to stay well* (page 46). "Having type 1 diabetes, I know it isn't always easy, but I attribute staying fit and healthy, after 27 years of living with type 1, to embracing these habits. Of course, I also encourage all of my clients to adopt the same principles in managing their own diabetes, and hope you will, too," says Dr Marsh.



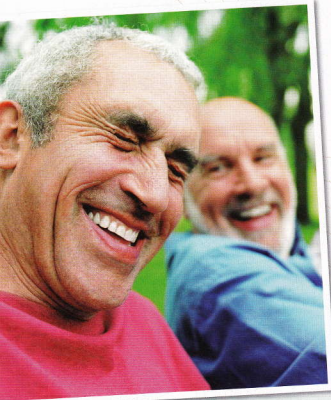


let's
laugh

for *better*
health

They say laughter is the best medicine. And here we give you the latest findings on how it can improve your health – plenty to bring a smile to your face.

When did you last double up in a side-splitting, big fat belly laugh? If you're hard-pressed to recall a moment of real mirth in the past few weeks, it could be that you've lost the humour habit. Everyday pressures like health worries, relationship tensions, workplace stress and mounting responsibilities can easily erode that ready sense of fun and joyous spontaneity we take for granted in childhood, gradually replacing silliness with silence. Yet scientific research pinpoints laughter as a health essential with special benefits for people with diabetes – reason enough to find ways to fire up your funny bone. Here's how laughter can improve your health.



Humour fix for your BGLs

While healthy eating, regular activity, taking your medication and keeping yourself well informed are the cornerstones of diabetes management, a Japanese study shows that a generous dose of laughter can also help blood glucose control. Researchers gave a group of people with type 2 diabetes a 2100kJ meal, followed by an intentionally boring 40-minute lecture, then measured their BGLs two hours later.

The procedure was repeated on a different day, but the lecture was replaced with a comedy show of the same duration. The blood glucose levels of the participants after the 'boring' intervention were 6.8mmol/L, whereas their blood glucose levels only rose to 4.3mmol/L after the laughter treatment. This study suggests that a side dish of humour can have a positive effect in keeping your BGLs in the healthy range after eating.

Chuckle for your kidneys

In the same Japanese study (see above), researchers found that laughter also prompted a reduction in the participants' levels of prorenin – an early warning sign of diabetes-related kidney disease. It was discovered in a related study that prolonged laughter therapy over a six-month period promoted favourable changes linked to blood pressure and diabetes. The findings from these two studies suggest that short-term and long-term laughter treatments may help stave off kidney disease in people with diabetes. ➤

Find your funny bone

Scientists can squabble over the details, but there's no denying a good gut-wrenching guffaw feels great! Of course, one person's belly laugh is another's damp squib, so it can take some time to remind yourself what triggers your giggle – especially if you're out of practice! No matter what your tastes, the following suggestions should help inject a bit of levity into your life.



Catch a cartoon

If you receive the newspaper in the morning, skip the doom-and-gloom headlines and go straight to the cartoon page. Cut out your favourites and put them on the fridge for a daily chuckle.

Tune in and drop out

Listen to your favourite radio personalities in the morning on your way to work. If you want to hear the programs again, most radio stations now make broadcasts available on their websites.



Play a goofy game

Host a game night with friends, but keep it non-competitive in nature. Quirky games like Twister and Pictionary can draw hoots and howls, even from the most stone-faced people.

Let loose

Do something out of character and have a laugh at your own expense. Try tenpin bowling, dodgem cars, miniature golf or karaoke – and perhaps a trip to the comedy club before heading home!



Crack up on comedy

Watch comedies with your favourite funny actors. DVDs are cheap these days, so you could just buy movies or TV shows for your 'personal laughter' library.

Hit on happy

YouTube is a limitless source of funny videos.

Search for your favourite comedians and watch highlights of their shows. Google for joke websites, misquoted song lyrics or funny photos. Whatever trips your trigger, be sure to bookmark the sites so you can come back and have a laugh at any time.



Catch the giggle virus

If humour really is infectious, then keep positive, uplifting and funny friends close at hand – and the social contact is good for your spirit, too.

Book a joker

Visit your local library and ask the staff to help you locate humorous reads or joke books.



Have a merry ole time!

Even if you can't raise a genuine laugh, you can still enjoy the health benefits of a chest-heaving chuckle by simply faking it, according to Dr Madan Kataria, co-founder of Laughter Yoga (www.laughteryoga.org).

"Your body can't differentiate between acted and genuine laughter," says Dr Kataria. "Both produce the same happy chemistry." This is one reason, perhaps, why the concept of laughter therapy is fast catching on worldwide. What started off in 1995 as five people laughing for no reason in a park in India, has now turned into a global phenomenon with more than 6000 laughter clubs in 65 countries, including 45 in Australia.

Unlike physical yoga, which is for your muscles and joints, Laughter Yoga is a relaxed social experience, where people

get together to perform interactive chants and hand-clapping, plus acting out silly hypothetical scenarios. Participants, overtaken by a sense of the ridiculous, soon find simulated laughter contagiously morphing into the real thing, with all the ascribed benefits.

"The laughter movement is fast becoming as popular and well respected as yoga and meditation," says Bronwyn Roberts, chief happiness officer at Let's Laugh (www.letslaugh.com.au) in Victoria.

"Entry is free to most laughter clubs, though some leaders may charge a small fee to cover the cost of the venue hire," says Bronwyn. "And all ages are welcome. In my group, our youngest member was four years old and the oldest was 87."

Like anything in life, laughter is a habit – the more you practise, the easier it becomes and the more relaxed you feel.

"It's about being in the moment, not thinking about your problems or things you have to do, or even how silly you feel, but allowing yourself time to play, to release your inner child and give you some exercise," adds Bronwyn.

In a world gone serious, that's something we could all use.





Run riot on bugs

People with diabetes often have poorer resistance to illness and infection, but a Californian study has found that a good laugh can actually boost your immunity. Researchers at Loma Linda University took blood samples from 52 non-diabetic men before, during and after they watched an hour-long funny video. They found that beneficial increases in their protective, natural-killer-cell activity and immunoglobulins (proteins involved in the production of antibodies) lasted as much as 12 hours afterwards. The study concluded that laughter may have important benefits for the immune system and should be integrated into other types of health therapy.

"Laughter is a habit – the more you practise, the easier it becomes."

Lift the lid on pressure

While a surge of emotion is known to kick-start our sympathetic nervous system into speeding up the heart rate and raising blood pressure – tricky if you have cardiovascular problems associated with diabetes – laughter gets the all-clear. A study in which three groups of men viewed either a humorous, sad or neutral movie found that only those watching the sad movie had a rise in their levels, suggesting that feelgood or unchallenging entertainment may act as a buffer against raised blood pressure.

Grinners are winners

According to Diabetes Australia, people with diabetes are twice as likely to develop depression, and those with depression have a doubled risk of developing diabetes due to elevated stress hormones and weight gain – particularly relevant with the dark winter months approaching. The good news is that studies have shown that both humorous stimuli and a healthy sense of humour are associated with lower levels of depression, loneliness and stress, and higher levels of self-esteem, as well as a better quality of life. ■