

...s, but is more flexible in its approach. Even when there is not a lot going on in his environment, his imagination and innovativeness will help keep him out of a mental rut, will allow him to enjoy himself, and will prevent boredom and depression.”<sup>44</sup>

Humorous thoughts, and in particular “mirthful laughter,” work their wonders by initially arousing and distracting the mind, and then leaving us feeling more relaxed.<sup>45</sup> Scientists theorize that laughter stimulates the production of brain catecholamines and endorphins, which affect hormonal levels in the body, some related to feelings of joy, an easing of pain and strengthened immune response.<sup>46</sup>

“Humor,” says Edward deBono, M.D., a leading authority on the physiology of creativity, “*is by far the most significant behavior of the human mind.*”<sup>47</sup> A quick infusion of light-heartedness can not only boost your

energy but may help make you more helpful toward others and improve cognitive processes such as judgment, problem solving and decision making.<sup>48</sup> Here are several ideas for lightening up.

**Cultivate cosmic humor.** Above all, spontaneous mirth is something you *allow* to happen naturally—through a sense of relaxation and fun. Start looking for more of the ridiculous, incongruous events that go on around you all the time. Point them out to others. Make up short stories about the funniest things you see or hear and use them to spice up family discussions at the end of the day.

**Laugh more.** William F. Fry, Jr., M.D., emeritus associate clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine, suggests that laughing 100 times a day is a good, healthful goal.<sup>49</sup> And Dr. Fry even thinks that you don’t always need humor to benefit from laughter.<sup>50</sup> When you’re stuck in traffic, for example, just start laughing. Apparently the shift in facial muscles and changes in blood flow may trigger some of the benefits of genuine laughter.<sup>51</sup> Above all, look for more of the positive humor embedded in your life experiences and seek out other people you can laugh with.

**Start a humor library.** What makes you laugh? Whether it’s cartoons, letters from friends, posters, old or new comedy movies, joke encyclopedias or humorous stories (in books or on audiotapes for listening while you work or drive), expand your collection. Pay attention to whatever tickles your funny bone—and make it a point to surround yourself with more of it.

Laughter is inner

jogging.

—Norman Cousins,  
American editor and  
essayist

To change one’s life:

- Start immediately.
- Do it flamboyantly.
- No exceptions.

—William James, M.D.,  
founder of modern  
psychology