



Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program

Why Smiling Improves Your Health

“A warm smile is the universal language of kindness.” ~William Arthur Ward

A genuine smile has many positive effects on our minds and bodies. Research shows that smiling is contagious, and can even lengthen our lives by improving our immune systems. The act of smiling releases neuropeptides that combat the negative effects of stress, which means that smiling lowers stress and anxiety. Smiling also releases neurotransmitters that improve mood, including dopamine, endorphins, and serotonin. When those neurotransmitters are released, the nervous system relaxes and it can lower heart rate and blood pressure. In addition, the endorphins released when we smile act as natural pain relievers. Finally, smiling causes the body to produce white blood cells to help fight illness. When we were younger, most of us tapped into this resource naturally; although the research and exact number vary, it is clear that most adults laugh and smile far less than children do.

Smiling is contagious because the part of your brain that is responsible for your facial expressions resides in the cingulate cortex, which is an unconscious automatic response area. The muscles around your mouth want to form a smile when you see someone else smile. So, when you see someone else smile, it would take a conscious effort on your part not to return the smile. Upwards of 80 to 90% of our communication is non-verbal, and research shows that smiling communicates that we are attractive, reliable, relaxed, and sincere. Smiling not only makes the smiler feel more comfortable; it causes the observer to feel more comfortable as well.

Don't feel like smiling? Try it. Research shows that consciously “faking” a smile can still improve your mood and reduce stress. Or, if you need some help, read something

funny; listen to a comedy radio station; watch something funny on TV or on your computer; or remember something that happened in your past that makes you smile. Find a way to smile more throughout your day. Not only will it improve your health, but it will also improve your mood, your thoughts, and how comfortable people are around you. Smiling yet? Start now!

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