



AGING TODAY

Live Love Laughter



By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

Every time I think of last New Year's Eve, I can't help but smile as I relive one of the most joyously memorable evenings with my family. We gathered together at my home for pretty great food and wine, but the part of the evening that transforms my smile into an LOL is thinking about the antics that ensued as part of the game, *Cards against Humanity*. This card game is a more than slightly off color version of the game Apples to Apples.

At any given time, it was unclear who was tickled by the content of the game or overcome with the contagious side splitting laughter that rippled in waves. Sitting at my kitchen table, flanked by a brother on either side, I felt a closeness to my family that was undeniable.

I don't need the latest study in neuroscience to tell me that the euphoria I was feeling was real and a result of the endorphins produced by the very simple and primal act of laughter. So can we laugh our way to good health? I'm down to try, are you with me?

Research has shown laughing to have a positive effect on our immune system with an increase in T cell production. Laughing works the cardiovascular system and lowers blood pressure. The more research you do the more you will find documenting the physiological proof that laughter is good medicine.

My personal epiphany comes with the knowledge that laughter, as an evolutionary tool confirms why we must keep our aging seniors from living in isolation. Laughter evolved as a vocal confirmation of forming and deepening alliances and friendships. In apes, dogs, and even rats the labored breathing and subsequent sounds that are formed mean I am playing. I am on your team. In humans it means, I like you.

It's true, laughter is social according to neuroscientist Robert R. Provine, an emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Maryland. In *Laughter: As Scientific Investigation*, Provine's research revealed that in less than 20% of incidents did people giggle, chortle, or even guffaw in response to something that could be construed as amusing. Test this at your next social gathering. Laughter typically follows mundane comments rather than formal attempts of humor with the speaker much more likely to laugh than the listener.

Laughter is a group activity. We laugh 30 times more often when we are in a group than when alone. Far and away this is the most compelling reason to seek the situations and opportunities to laugh. More often than not, you will not be doing it alone.

Once again, I implore you to go back to our design specs. We must address the issue of social isolation that has become part of the American landscape for our aging population. Civilization as we know it is based upon how we thrived in groups both emotionally and physically. Laughter served as both a reward and a tool to forge bonds and to dominating the animal kingdom.

It's true that perhaps our younger selves looked for partners who made us laugh. The reality is truly that we laugh the most around those we love. If you're feeling sick, lacking energy, or are stressed, try a few rounds of laughter. Or look for opportunities to include neighbors and lonely seniors in your silly antics. Laughter truly has the power to make us happy.



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