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Laughter is the best medicine



Linda and Bill Hamaker find laughter to be the best medicine, starting a 'Let's Laugh Today' laughter club that promotes healthy living through the exercise of laughter. The group meets the fourth Monday of each month in Franklin, Mass.

Let's laugh today, shall we?

Let's laugh not because it's funny, but because it's healthy.

Certified laughter yoga leaders Bill and Linda Hamaker, of Walpole, Mass., invite you to join them at a meeting of their club - "Let's Laugh Today" - when it meets 7:30-8:30 p.m. on the fourth Monday of each month in the First Universalist Society Meeting House, 262 Chestnut St., Franklin, Mass.

For those who find it hard to howl or guffaw, the couple says that even a fake laugh has the same health benefits of a real one, so there's really no excuse not to try laughter yoga.

There's no special equipment needed, and you don't need to come dressed in sweats or spandex.

"With laughter yoga, you get the feel-good kick and actual happy chemistry of a great workout," said Linda Hamaker in a class announcement, "and yet won't sweat or even feel that you have exercised."

Is it an exercise class or a comic class? Hint: There is no joke-telling. You do not need to be happy or even have a sense of humor. "It's a form of exercise that strengthens the immune system, unwinds the negative effects of stress, lowers blood pressure, improves mental alertness, enhances blood oxygen levels, boosts circulation and makes you feel good by lifting your spirits," say the group leaders.

"You will be amazed at all the health benefits there are to laughter," said Linda Hamaker.

Laughter Yoga International was founded in 1995 in India by Dr. Madan Kataria and Madhuri Kataria, who say that contrary to popular belief, laughter yoga has proven that one does not need a sense of humor to laugh; laughter can be learned and programmed into the body to bring about a complete transformation. They claim that research has proved that just 10 to 20 minutes of fake or real laughter has a profound benefit on the human body.

At its October meeting, the group numbered around 40, with members coming from many local towns.

"We now have several women from Woonsocket attending and have had 40 people at each meeting, so I would say that it has been very successful," she said. "The room can hold 200. Everyone seems to just love Let's Laugh Today Laughter Club, especially in these stressful times. We have received much positive feedback."

Hamaker said she's hoping to attract even more members to the meetings, "since this is so much needed in these times and there is nothing like this being offered nearby."

There is a suggested donation of \$5 per person or family per meeting, which covers operating costs.

Call 508-660-2223 or e-mail letslaughtoday@verizon.net for more information, or visit the Web site letslaughtoday.com.

Why laugh with us? from the Laughter Club Web site:

- * Laughter is a stress buster; it actually changes our body chemistry and unwinds the negative effects of stress.
- * Laughter promotes inner tranquility and relaxation.
- * Laughter strengthens the immune system and makes you more resistant to diseases by enriching your blood with ample supplies of oxygen.

- * Laughter alleviates pain and gives you a sense of well being through the release of endorphins.
- * Laughter can lower blood pressure.
- * Laughter can alleviate depression and anxiety.
- * Laughter improves lung capacity.
- * Laughter allows us to be playful and to just feel good by boosting our sense of humor.
- * Laughter helps you cope with challenges and conflict better.
- * Laughter yoga is aerobic exercise and burns calories. Laughter is internal jogging.
- * Laughter yoga boosts your self confidence, communication skills and creativity.
- * Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.