

The Best Medicine, After All

It is always refreshing when science is on your side. For years, I've been talking about the power of laughter for family caregivers. It may not be the first conversation to have with someone who just received the call in the middle of the night that something traumatic has happened to a loved one, but eventually they will smile. And if today's 12th annual Fort Lauderdale Fearless Caregiver Conference is true to form, we will be sharing laughs as well as tears and wisdom with one another. The truth is that there are some things that will make family caregivers roil with laughter which non-caregivers could never understand. Another powerful reason for joining a support group...but that is another rant.

As I mentioned above, statistics are now on my side when discussing the power of humor for family caregivers. A new study finds that laughing a lot can actually make you healthier by lowering blood pressure and bad levels of cholesterol.

Dr. Lee Berk, from Loma Linda University, California, who led a study on the healing power of laughter, said emotions and behavior had a physical impact on the body. He concluded that "the body's response to repetitive laughter is similar to the effect of repetitive exercise."

Volunteers who were asked to watch 20 minutes of comedies and stand-up routines registered a dramatic drop in stress hormones, blood pressure and cholesterol. They also had their appetite stimulated, as happens with exercise. This means that "laughercise" could be a way to reduce heart disease and diabetes. It is especially important for the elderly, who may find it hard to do physical exercise.

"As the old biblical wisdom states, it may indeed be true that laughter is good medicine," he said.

Amen and ha-ha-ha.

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