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Tell Two Jokes and Call Me in the Morning

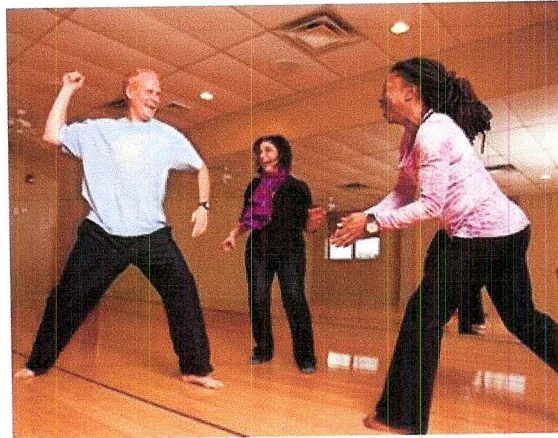
Laughter really may be the best medicine. Two local experts explain why. Plus, a new laser could reduce chronic pain, and a doctor has strict orders about maintaining your heart health.

BY THERESA GAWLAS MEDOFF PUBLISHED JANUARY 10, 2011 AT 11:47 AM

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Sixty lawyers sit in a big, sloppy circle, all clapping their hands and chanting ho-ho-ho-hah-hah-hah.

It's the warm-up to a session of laughter yoga at the Delaware State Bar Association's annual Women and the Law Section Retreat. After loosening up a bit, the lawyers spend 20 minutes practicing different types of laughs with Christa Scalies of Wilmington, a certified laughter yoga instructor.



Jeff Dietz (from left), Christa Scalies and Jeannette Oshitoye practice laughter yoga. Photograph by Jared Castaldi

There's the Last Minute Brief laugh: laughing maniacally and pretending to type furiously while walking around the room and commiserating with others working on their briefs. There's the We-Won-the-Case laugh: throwing arms in the air, using gestures of celebration and laughing, adding exuberant woohoos as seems fitting. And there are more.

Attorney Pam Meitner had never done laughter yoga before, never even heard of it, but the concept appealed to her. "I've read articles about laughter being good medicine, and I know that deep breathing helps you to relax and relieve tension," she says. "It made sense that this was positive for my body."

Laughter yoga dates to 1995, when it was popularized in India by Madan Kataria, a western-trained medical doctor from Mumbai. "Laughter yoga incorporates yogic breathing with laughter exercises, stretching and chanting," Scalies explains. "Dr. Kataria's exercises employ the technique 'fake it until you make it.' The body cannot tell the difference between real laughter and fake laughter. Both produce happy chemistry, or mood-boosting endorphins."

Just how good laughter is for the body is something the medical community is only now beginning to understand. A popular movement recognizing the mental and physical benefits of laughter preceded the medical community's embrace of laughter therapy by years, says Ph.D. psychologist Paul McGhee of Wilmington, a pioneer in laughter research and author of the just-released book "Humor: The Lighter Path to Resilience and Health."

Research into the benefits of laughter falls under psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI, the study of the interaction between the nervous and immune systems and the relationship between behavior and health.

"The bottom line is that there is a physical basis for the mind-body connection," McGhee says.

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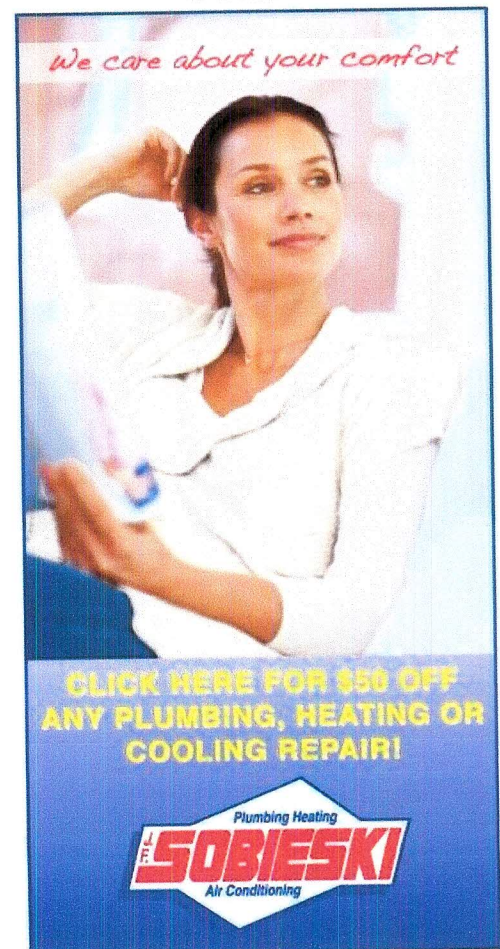
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