

Take a dose of laughter

Good-natured fun will make the waning winter colds and flus lose their sting. Here's how to add some lightness until summer and wellness set in.

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With the weather still on this side of chilly, it might be better to stay in and nest — especially when nursing a cold. Once you've got your medicine, pajamas and hot

cocoa at the ready, grab something that will tickle your funny bone, because laughing can help speed up the healing process, according to Steve Wilson, a Columbus, Ohio-based psychologist and aptly titled "joyologist." "Laughter has its own biology," says the member of the American Association for Therapeutic Humor. "Laughter increases relaxation, reduces stress and pain. Laughter also reduces adrenaline in

the bloodstream, which can interfere with healing." That said, here is a recipe that will starve your cold and feed your funny bone:

■ **Go to the humor section** of the library and grab some of your favorite funny authors and pore over it when you're in your comfy reading chair. If you are too tired to read yourself, have someone read to, Wilson says. "The stimulation will change your brain chemistry, which will pull you along to health."

■ **Go to the video store** and rent films with your favorite comedian. Once the laughter ensues, remember those who laugh live longer. "Combine laughter with humor and you have a respite from stresses and strains of a cold," Wilson said. "When you find humor in something, you can cope with it better." Having a laughter list of movies and books at the ready will make the cold fighting quicker.

■ **Start a laughter jar** — a jar with numerous funny memories and occurrences from your life that you can access in case of emergency. Pull one out when you need to get a dose of laughter. Even better, call the friend or family member you experienced it with and share the joy. Two laughs are always bet-

ter than one.

■ **When in doubt**, laugh it out through a CD. Recordings of people laughing can get you smiling and laughing on your own. Laughter in this regard may be more contagious than a cold, which is one of the reasons why TV shows use a laugh track.

A study Robert Provine published in *American Scientist* journal in 1996 showed that people are 30 times less likely to laugh alone than in a group. Provine's group of 128 undergraduate psychology students listened to a laugh box that played the sound of laughter 10 times, and then students reported how they felt to the laughter.

The first time half the students laughed, and 90 percent of them smiled at the least. By the 10th trial, only 3 of the 128 students laughed. According to Provine, hearing and seeing the other students laugh made the laugh box seem funny.

It was the combined stimulus of the laugh box and the laughter of other students that evoked continued laughter among the group. Wilson, founder and president of the World Laughter Tour, Inc., adds that coughing and sneezing puts strains on all types of muscles, but



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Take care of that funny bone. Laughter can help speed up the healing process, says Steve Wilson, an Ohio-based psychologist and "joyologist!"

laughing at something funny can get the fluids flowing.

"If you laugh so hard, tears start flowing and your nose starts running, your airways become clear and it puts your body more at ease to sleep better," he says. "Everything operates in a healthy way more efficiently when you laugh."