

## ART134

exercise technique series

### Laughter as Physical Activity

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**IT MIGHT BE HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT LAUGHTER IS A BENEFICIAL EXERCISE. SPECIALLY DESIGNED LAUGH CLASSES** are being offered at facilities around the country and the world in rapidly increasing numbers. A laugh class elicits laughter without jokes and teaches the body to laugh spontaneously by combining breathing and playful exercise activities. The workout is surprisingly vigorous and can be modified to meet all fitness levels and demographics. As a fitness technique, laugh-exercise is unique and contains all the benefits of conventional exercise—muscle conditioning, aerobic training, flexibility, coordination, breathing, relaxation. Yet, it includes additional benefits that change the neuro-physiology of the body to reduce stress, anger, and depression while fostering feelings of kindness, joy, forgiveness, and love. The individual exercises can compliment a traditional workout session or fitness class by adding interest, variety, and a new dimension.

**LAUGH EXERCISE** is true exercise, exertion for the sake of training physical fitness. According to William Fry M.D., Professor Emeritus at Stanford University, “One hundred laughs a day provides the same benefits as a ten minute aerobic workout . . . Laughter has the same aerobic participation, the same aerobic stimulation of the muscular system and other systems.”

**IN ADDITION, NEUROSCIENTIST AND RESEARCHER, DR. ROBERT PROVINE SAYS THAT “LAUGHTER IS LIKE MUSIC** and consists of individual notes—HA, HO, HEE, HUH. . . Measured on a sound spectrogram, laughter is a series of short bursts of sound lasting 1/15th of a second and recurring every 1/3 of a second. Laughs come in all shapes and forms but have a similar sonic structure ranging from a high pitched titter to a mid-range HA, HA, to a low HO, HO.” Clifford C. Kuhn M.D. at the University Of Louisville School of Medicine, who is also a part-time comic, describes sixteen stages of laughter from subtle to raucous. During a laugh exercise class every type of laughter is experienced, and each different laugh uses the muscles in a slightly different way and so greater variety is achieved.

**THE MUSCLES** used during a laugh workout encompass the total body including the fifteen different muscles in the face, which are normally not worked in a traditional exercise session. The transverse abdominal muscles—the primary group responsible for expiration—is engaged in every laugh exercise along with the other core muscles including the rectus abdominus, internal and external oblique abdominals, gluteus, and back muscles, as well as the shoulders, arms, and legs.

**BREATHING** is enhanced as respiration increases by participation in specific laughing exercises designed to develop specific respiratory responses. For example, the Quiet Laugh, the Silent Laugh, the Vigorous Laugh, and the Intermittent Laugh each creates a specific physical result. Laughter itself is a respiratory exercise, as Dr. Robert Provine, laughter researcher at the University of Maryland, states, “human laughter is produced by chopping an exhalation . . . Ha Ha Ha. . . You can’t inhale on a laugh.”

**THE CLASS IS STRUCTURED** in a conventional workout format, including warm-up, peak exercise, cool-down, and relaxation, that ranges from thirty to sixty minutes in duration. The warm-up (approximately five minutes) gradually introduces the laughter and progressively builds on basic exercises until the desired intensity is reached. For example, an instructor introduces laughing in warm-up with a rhythmic repetitive chanting of the words HO-HO-HA-HA-HA, HO-HO-HA-HA-HA combined with clapping and hand, arm and leg movements. The warm-up also includes Interactive Laugh exercises, which encourage a sense of unity as participants respond to each other by looking into each other’s eyes as the exercise is performed. For example, during the “East/West Greeting” exercisers walk around the room and bow graciously with hands in a prayer position (eastern greeting) followed by shaking the person’s hand (western greeting) but instead of saying the word hello on each gesture, they substitute laughter.

**IF A PERSON DOES NOT FEEL LIKE LAUGHING, THEY ARE INSTRUCTED TO FAKE-IT**, because research has shown that a pretend laugh is just as effective as a real one. According to Dr. Kuhn, the release of endorphins into the central nervous system that creates the feeling of euphoria is the same during the motions of a simulated laugh as a genuine laugh. Humans automatically respond to others who are laughing, and therefore, counterfeit laughing becomes contagious and evolves into bona fide belly laughing by the entire group as the class continues. The work-out, (i.e. the laughter), continues and is maintained through various exercises for fifteen to twenty minutes at a given intensity depending on the participant profile. The intensity is varied by manipulating the types of exercises. Some laugh exercises are very vigorous and fast moving while others are slower with soft or quiet laughter.

**EXAMPLES OF LAUGH EXERCISES** include the Lion Laugh, which combines laughing with the Yoga Lion Posture, the Child’s Laugh, which induces relaxation using child-like laughter, and the Meditative Laugh which allows the body to spontaneously react to itself. Exercises are performed in a variety of positions. Some are executed in place, seated, standing or lying down, and others move around the room. The Interactive Laugh exercises continue throughout the class to promote and develop positive social responsiveness in a variety of group activities. In addition, the exercises promote imagination, creativity, free expression, group awareness and cooperation while moving and laughing. For example, during the “Clown Car” exercise, the instructor guides the group to enter a tiny imaginary Volkswagon Beetle car. Everyone scrunches quietly together. Once inside they hold their laughter. Then, one at a time, they leave the car while bursting into laughter. “Crowded elevator” is a variation of this exercise in which everyone enters and exits an imaginary packed elevator.

**THE INSTRUCTOR OF A LAUGH EXERCISE CLASS** acts as story-teller guiding the group through the animation of the exercises, using a structured format, which is somewhat standard, with specific types of exercises inserted at appropriate places within it. Most classes are “themed” taking the participants on a trip or adventure such as the zoo, a water-park, a cross country road-trip, the circus, or planting a garden. So, each individual exercise is then modified and titled to fit as a piece of the story. For example the “Clown Car” and “Crowded Elevator” are basically the same exercise, but one would be used in the class called “A Night at the Circus,” and the other in the class called “A Day in the City.”

**AS THE TYPICAL THIRTY-MINUTE CLASS PROGRESSES**, it may contain ten to twenty laugh exercises, which elicit from six hundred to twelve hundred or more individual laughs depending on the class design. The cool down gradually reduces the laughter through specific cool-down exercises like the quiet laugh (laughing by gesturing without making a sound). This is essentially important because once a participant begins to laugh a sense of euphoria takes hold, and it often becomes difficult to stop laughing. The cool-down exercises reduce the intensity of laughter and bring the participant’s physiology to a relaxation mode. After stillness is achieved, the instructor guides the participant to normal levels of functioning awareness.

**THE TRAINING EFFECTS** after laugh exercise classes include increased energy, reduced blood pressure, and general improved sense of well being. Regular participation promotes a decrease in stress, anger, and frustration in daily events. For example, road rage diminishes to smiles and a friendly hello to the person in the other car while enjoying the downtime of a traffic jam. Dr Kuhn states that, “Humans are biologically designed to laugh and the harder the laugh the greater the benefit. Regular participation changes the brain chemistry to positively change reactions and moods. Therefore, participation in a laugh class is especially beneficial to reduce stress, the number one cause of most illnesses and doctor visits and a major cause of depression in our country. In addition, laugh exercise is an active relaxation technique that is helpful to individuals who prefer activity rather than quiet restful stress reduction exercises.

**UNIQUELY**, a laugh class can be designed and marketed as a family class to include mom, dad, grandma, grampa, and the kids. Classes typically contain a mixed profile of ages and fitness levels. Of course, as with all exercise programs, an instructor should conduct health screening and require individuals with major risk factors or who have recently undergone an operation or medical procedure—particularly abdominal surgery—to obtain physician’s clearance to exercise. Be on the cutting edge of fitness in your community, tone-up your funny bone, and stimulate your participants with something new by becoming a Certified Laugh Exercise Instructor.

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## **ART134 QUIZ**

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- 1 - Laugh exercise is true exercise.
- 2 - A laugh class includes warm-up, peak exercise, cool-down, and relaxation.
- 3 - A typical thirty-minute laugh exercise class contains from six hundred to twelve hundred or more individual laughs depending on the class design.
- 4 - The muscles used during a laugh workout are exclusively the abdominals.
- 5 - Laughter itself is a respiratory exercise because you inhale during a laugh..
- 6 - Laughter consists of individual notes that are a series of short bursts of sound.
- 7 - The Lion Laugh combines laughing with the Yoga Lion Posture.
- 8 - Interactive Laugh exercises encouraged participants to respond to each other.
- 9 - It is important to always engage in a real laugh because a fake laugh is not effective.
- 10 - A laugh class can be designed and marketed as a family workout