



Photo courtesy of Daniel Snyder

Splendid Director of Wellness Sarah Kennedy is a certified Laughter Yoga leader.

Laughter Yoga: It's good for you — and fun, too

Submitted by Sarah Kennedy
SPLENDIDO DIRECTOR OF WELLNESS

A good laugh might help lead you to a good life.

That's the notion compelling older Tucsonans to follow the mantra "laughter is the best medicine" in new yoga classes that follow an easy syllabus: All you have to do is laugh.

Laughter Yoga classes combine breathing techniques with laughter exercises that release tension, increase circulation and reduce stress. Not only are the classes fun, but they are one of the few exercise programs that merge mental and physical aspects into a total workout.

Older adults who participate in Laughter Yoga often see amazing results after just a short period. The class environment in itself sparks amusement and child-like attitudes that fill the room, taking participants' minds off stressful situations while focusing on a healthy exercise.

Studies show the sessions reduce levels of cortisol, a stress-associated hormone that greatly decreases bone density and muscle tissue. Laughter Yoga also releases endorphins — neurotransmitters that prevent nerve cells from sending pain signals.

In combination with chemical messengers such as dopamine, which create feelings of well-being, the classes become pleasing and naturally habit-forming, translating to more laughter and joy outside of the workout environment.

While exercises such as jogging and running promote circulation, Laughter Yoga uniquely uses the abdomen. Most of our lung capacity comes from abdominal breathing, but if you

If you go

Here are some places that offer Laughter Yoga classes in Tucson.

- Lotus Massage & Wellness Center, 2850 E. Grant Road, 5:30-6:15 p.m. every Thursday. Call 326-7700 for more information. Cost is \$1.
- Gita Fendelman has a full schedule of Laughter Yoga classes on her Web site, www.laughteryogawithgita.com.

aren't bringing in oxygen this way, your body retains stale air full of carbon dioxide and potential toxins. Laughter increases oxygen intake, allowing participants to feel fresh all day. Breathing in more fully oxygenates the blood, leaving the body bursting with energy.

Stress attacks the digestive system and creates problems such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome, hemorrhoids and even colon cancer. Digestion takes time, keeping us from what we'd rather be doing, such as spending time with friends and family. Using the belly in breathing and laughter increases circulation into the liver and colon, helping the body remove waste and work more efficiently.

The M.D. Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas is one of many research institutions that have incorporated Laughter Yoga into their treatment plans, finding that laughter plays a major role in deciding the course of disease in patients.

Those interested in trying this innovative workout should look for a local session and come prepared with an open mind — the results may surprise you.

► Contact Sarah Kennedy at skennedy@splendidotucson.com.

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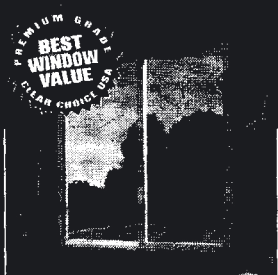
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