

# me

Massage Envy Magazine

PLUS

Learn how to  
break your  
worst habits

MassageEnvy.com | WINTER 2009

Exercise  
your  
funny  
bone

DO YOU  
SUFFER  
FROM  
PORTION  
DISTORTION ?

Stop  
stress  
from  
slowing  
you down

## Healing with Heat

Hot stone  
massage can  
melt away  
your stress

PAGE 10



## Tis the Season

The holidays creep up faster each year: Stores deck the halls mid-October and kids create wish lists just after Halloween.

Follow these four tips to bring back the joy this season—whenever it starts:

**1. DELEGATE.** Planning a party? Ask your kids to make place cards, your significant other to pick up groceries and guests to bring a dish.

**2. SAY NO.** Keep commitments to a minimum, and enjoy time with loved ones without overstressing yourself socially.

**3. TAKE CARE OF YOU.** Maintain your healthy lifestyle year-round.

Squeeze in extra exercise to help manage extra calories and a massage to manage stress.

**4. CLICK TO GIFT.** Shop online when possible. Many sites offer free shipping and other incentives—and it can be done in your pajamas!



## Beat Winter Blahs

With less sun and fewer outdoor activities, winter can seem to drag on forever. But before you give in to hibernation-mode, try a new activity based on your personal style—and watch your winter blues fade away.

| YOUR STYLE             | YOUR PROJECT                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>DESIGNER</b>        | Revamp a room in your home. Paint your kitchen a warm shade of yellow—this color can instantly improve your mood.                                                |
| <b>CHEF</b>            | Pick a new recipe with exotic spices that will challenge your palate. Organize a dinner party to share your delicious discovery.                                 |
| <b>ATHLETE</b>         | Find a class you've never tried before at a local gym or community center. Try a kickboxing class one week and a belly-dancing class the next.                   |
| <b>PHILANTHROPIST</b>  | Research charities in your city that you feel passionate about. Volunteer your time on a Saturday afternoon—you'll feel instantly uplifted after helping others. |
| <b>SERENITY SEEKER</b> | Warm up during a relaxing massage and feel the stress of the season melt away. Massage Envy offers hot-stone massages and cozy velour or heated blankets.        |

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## Use 'Em or Lose 'Em

No, we're not talking about the gift cards you received during the holidays. We're talking about the dollars remaining in your flexible spending account (FSA). If your employer offers this healthcare benefit that allows you to set aside pre-tax dollars for the upcoming year's medical expenses, now's the time to deplete your account since they don't roll over to next year.

You can use FSA dollars for massage therapy, which can qualify as a medical expense if you suffer from stress, back pain, arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, fibromyalgia, anxiety or depression. You must also include a written prescription from your physician stating why and how often you need massage therapy and the duration of your treatment. Be sure to check with your healthcare provider for the details of your plan.

## Q & Ahhh

*Massage Envy experts answer your questions*



### **Q: How does massage affect fibromyalgia?**

**A:** Fibromyalgia is a disorder that creates chronic pain in muscles, tendons and ligaments. In addition, those suffering with this condition also experience severe fatigue and disrupted sleep patterns. Fibromyalgia affects about 3 percent of the U.S. population and women account for about 80 percent of those diagnosed.

The origin of fibromyalgia is unknown. Recent studies suggest that the pain doesn't start in the muscles but rather is created from high levels of certain neurotransmitters found in the fluid that flows throughout the brain and spinal column.

Fibromyalgia sufferers usually present with "tender points" throughout the body, but the majority of these points cluster around the neck, shoulders and low back. Massage is very effective for clients with this disorder. Research has shown that receiving regular therapeutic massage reduces pain, anxiety and depression and encourages relaxation, which can help restore normal sleep patterns.

For those experiencing symptoms of fibromyalgia, it would be wise to see a doctor for a complete diagnosis—usually one who specializes in rheumatology. Doctors familiar with fibromyalgia do recommend therapeutic massage as part of an overall wellness plan to help combat the symptoms of this chronic illness.—*C.G. Funk, Licensed Massage Therapist and Vice President of Industry Relations and Product Development for Massage Envy*

Do you have a question for our experts about massage therapy? Contact [info@MassageEnvy.com](mailto:info@MassageEnvy.com). Type "Ask CG" in the subject line.

## Be Radiant This Winter

Oh, the weather outside is frightful ... but that doesn't mean your skin has to be. It's important to make adjustments to your skincare routine as winter approaches. Howard Murad, M.D., associate clinical professor of medicine at UCLA and founder of Murad Inc., a leader in skincare for the past two decades, shares helpful tips to help you glow during the cooler months.

**Eat your fruits and veggies.** "Raw foods help nourish your skin and repair damage," Murad says. Try a new fruit like the gogi berry—they are nutritionally dense and help build collagen.

**Pump up the moisture.** "In the winter, the air is dryer and your skin produces less oil and is less moist, so you need to use a heavier moisturizer, depending on your individual skin type's needs,"

Murad says.

**Clean up quickly.** Hot showers and soaks can dry out skin, so keep bath time to a minimum. Apply moisturizer after a bath when your skin is a little moist.

**Restore your glow.** "It's important to rid your skin of the negative effects from the summer sun," Murad says. Massage Envy Spa locations offers Murad products like Active Radiance™ serum that can help repair existing sun damage and protect it from future damage.





## What's Your Story?

Tell us how massage improves your life, and you could be featured in our next issue. Simply send an e-mail to [memberstories@MassageEnvy.com](mailto:memberstories@MassageEnvy.com) with your full name, phone number and a brief description of how you benefit from being a Massage Envy member. We'll take it from there.

# Earning Her Reward

Massage Envy member Liesl Leary found the perfect motivation for exercise: massage

**LIESL LEARY IS NOT** what you'd call an exercise fanatic. The Boulder, Colo., mom is a self-proclaimed foodie who would happily skip out on exercise if it weren't for the health benefits.

"I just don't like working out," the 32-year-old says with a laugh. "I could pretty much go the rest of my life without it."

But then she found a motivator to help her commit to exercising: massage.

Like many women, Leary's first pregnancy came with weight gain, and a physical trainer helped her lose all but the last 10 pounds.

"At that point, I decided, 'I'm going to be fat, and I'm going to be happy with it,'" Leary says. But then, Baby No. 2 brought a 50-pound weight gain.

"I'm only 5'2". That's a lot," she says. She wanted to begin an exercise program, but needed a bit more motivation.

Leary's husband had given her a Massage Envy membership

as a birthday gift, but she had "mom guilt," she says. "When you're a mom and you do something and it's not for your kids, you feel guilty."

Still, she also knew that being healthy would help her be a better mom. So, she started a running program—and used regular massages to motivate her to keep going.

"Being able to enjoy that massage was the carrot that kept me running," she says. "You go through a lot of discomfort and pain to be a runner. If you have something that makes up for that discomfort, you'll keep it up."

After a year of running, Leary has lost her pregnancy weight—and then some. These days, she runs about three miles a day, three or four days a week. She's a healthy 135 pounds, and she's sticking with both her running regimen and her massage rewards.

"I don't feel so guilty about it anymore," she says. "I'm doing it for my kids in the end." —By Stephanie R. Conner



Liesl and her daughter Eris.



Get in  
the Habit

Make regular massage a part of your New Year's plan. Schedule your next three appointments now and write them—in pen—in your calendar.

# Hard Habits to Break

Overcome these obstacles to keeping your resolutions

**ONCE THE HOLIDAY HULLABALOO** subsides, it's time for New Year's resolutions. But before you make any, consider these obstacles, which cause one-third of resolution-makers to give up on their goals before the end of January.

**1. YOU AIM TOO HIGH.** If you wake up every Jan. 1 and decide it's time to ditch all your unhealthy habits, you'll end up disappointed. "Changing habits takes baby steps," says Toby Smithson, R.D., an American Dietetic Association spokesperson. Whether you want to save more money, get portions under control or reduce stress in your life, pick one thing and work on it until it becomes natural. Then move on to something else. If you need to adjust your goal—for example, managing stress may be more realistic than reducing it—that's fine, too.

**2. YOU MAKE EXCUSES.** Forming good habits is all about making it easy. Can't quit smoking because your job is too crazy? Too busy to squeeze in exercise

and massage? Snacking on chips instead of carrots because, well, they were there? It's time to take responsibility and make a plan! "A big key to success is planning ahead," Smithson says. Instead of making excuses, make a commitment to yourself. Set a quit date that will work. Make appointments for massage and exercise just as you would for important meetings. And stock your kitchen with quick, healthy snacks such as fruit, vegetables, reduced-fat popcorn and sugar-free gelatin with whipped topping, Smithson says.

**3. YOU GIVE UP TOO QUICKLY.** Success won't happen overnight and setbacks and slip-ups are likely. A study by Franklin-Covey found that only 40 percent of people had success with their resolutions on the first try. Set interim goals for yourself, so that you *will* see progress. It could take three weeks or three months to change your habit. The key is to keep trying. —By Jenn Woolson



# Stay Active to Stay Well

Exercise can give your immune system a leg up

**DESPITE ALMOST DAILY** scientific advances, researchers have yet to find a cure for the common cold or flu.

Fortunately, there's a sensible, relatively easy way to boost your immune system and stay healthier: exercise.

"Researchers have established a link between moderate, regular exercise and a strong immune system," says Jessica Matthews, continuing education coordinator for the American Council on Exercise (ACE) and an ACE-certified personal trainer.

## Get Your Immune Cells Moving

According to Matthews, moderate, regular exercise increases the production of immune cells. During moderate exercise, these immune cells circulate throughout the body more quickly, giving them more power to kill bacteria and viruses.

She emphasizes that the word "regular" is key when it comes to getting the biggest immune-boosting bang for your buck. "Research has shown that the immune system will return to its normal functioning level a few hours after the exercise has been completed," Matthews explains.

But exercising on a regular basis can have a cumulative effect and generate a long-term immune response, says David Nieman, Dr.P.H., a professor at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. His research demonstrated that people who walked at a moderate pace for 40 minutes a day had half as many sick days because of colds or sore throats than people who were sedentary.

### Keep Yourself Active

To strengthen your immune system, Matthews recommends 30 minutes of exercise at least five days a week. Walking, cycling, taking a fitness class or using an elliptical machine at the gym are all good options.

If you find it tough to clear 30 minutes for exercise, it's okay to break it up into three 10-minute sessions. Walk up and down the stairs at the office or ride a bike to the corner store instead of driving. Or take a walk with your family, friends or dog—a great way to multitask.

### Show Your Body Some Love

All exercise is a good stress-reducer, but activities like Pilates or yoga have some added advantages.

“A lot of people gravitate toward mind-body disciplines like these for their psychological benefits,” Matthews explains. “And I believe that you need to balance physical exertion with something that gives back to your body.”

For that reason, massage therapy may be a great addition to a well-rounded exercise program, she adds. Massage therapy not only aids in muscle recovery after exercise but can also improve immunity and promote a relaxation response.

“Because stress can have a negative impact on the immune system,” Matthews says, “the stress-relieving benefits of massage may assist in boosting immunity.”

### Don't Go to Extremes

As good as exercise is for you, too much of it may actually be bad for your immune system. Matthews says there's evidence that more than 90 minutes of

high-intensity endurance exercise can suppress the immune system. If you're training for a marathon or endurance event, balance your workouts by eating right, getting plenty of rest and giving your body a chance to recover between sessions.

But sticking to a regular routine of moderate physical activity is your best bet if you want to power up your immune system. You just might be able to give cold and flu bugs the one-two punch that will knock them right out of your system—and help you stay healthy all season long. —By Amy Lynn Smith

*All Things in Moderation*  
What exactly is moderate exercise?  
It's any form of physical activity that will raise your heart rate and cause you to break a sweat, but still allow you to easily carry on a conversation.



### When to Take an Exercise Sick Day

Not every illness has to put the brakes on your fitness routine, but there are times to give it a rest.

Sports medicine experts suggest it's probably safe to engage in moderate exercise if your symptoms seem related to a cold and are above the neck, such as a stuffy nose. If your symptoms are

more flu-like and below the neck—such as respiratory congestion—it's best to lay off exercise for a few days. Skip exercising altogether if you have a fever or severe flu symptoms like extreme tiredness, muscle aches or swollen glands. Wait two to four weeks after a severe case of the flu before returning to your exercise routine.



# Serve It Up Right

How to keep portion distortion under control

**ONE OF THE FIRST STEPS** on the journey to wellness is making healthier food choices. Nonfat dairy and leaner cuts of meat can help reduce calories and fat, while whole grains not only contain more vitamins and minerals but also have more fiber to keep you feeling fuller longer.

But what if the issue isn't *what* you're eating, but *how much*?

In a survey conducted by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), just 1 percent of respondents could correctly identify the recommended serving sizes of eight different foods, such as mashed potatoes, green salad and pasta. (That would be  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, 1 cup, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, respectively.) Meanwhile, 63 percent of respondents missed five or more questions.

Even the professionals can have trouble: An article in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* reveals that not just laymen but also "registered nurses and dietitians ... are inaccurate at estimating the calories from large portions."

Adding to the confusion: The "Nutrition Facts" serving size standards created by the federal government are based on nutritional goals, while serving sizes used by food manufacturers are

based on customarily consumed portions. (It's a case of "should eat" vs. "does eat.")

The cost of not knowing could be a heavy one—extra weight. An extra 1/2 cup of creamed spinach at dinner translates into about 165 more calories. Do that every night, and you could be 15 pounds heavier by year's end.

### Bigger Isn't Always Better

While you could tote a measuring scale to the dining table, luckily there are easier ways to overcome the "larger than life" syndrome many people experience when plating food:

**Use smaller plates and bowls.** A study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* invited nutrition science professors and graduate students to an ice cream social. Some received smaller ice cream bowls and scoops; some received bowls that were twice as large; and some were handed bigger scoops, too. Those who got bigger bowls and scoops served themselves 53 percent more ice cream than those given small bowls and scoops. (The serving size for ice cream, by the way, is 1/2 cup.)

**Scale back automatically.** Registered dietitian Karen Collins, nutrition advisor to the AICR, suggests trying portions that are three-quarters the size of usual. "Just eyeball the portion and cut back by a quarter," says Collins. You could save up to 500 calories a day.

**Retrain your brain.** Look up the serving size of your favorite foods, then fill a measuring cup or spoon with that amount and turn it out onto a clean plate. Study the actual size—what does 1/2 cup of ice cream look like?—and keep that in the back of your mind the next time you're serving it up. —By Sam Mittelsteadt

## Visualize the Right Serving Size

Nutrition experts have also created charts that can help eaters equate the correct serving size of particular foods with familiar objects—sometimes, it's as close as your own hand.

### Hand-y Guides

|                            |                                              |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1 tsp. of butter           | From the tip of the thumb to the first joint |
| 1 oz. of nuts              | A handful                                    |
| 1.5 oz. of cheese          | The middle and index fingers                 |
| 3 oz. of meat              | The palm of the hand                         |
| 1 c. of dried cooked beans | The fist                                     |

### Sports and Recreation Equivalents

|                           |                |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| 2 Tbsp. peanut butter     | Ping pong ball |
| 1/4 c. dried fruit        | Golf ball      |
| 1/2 bagel                 | Hockey puck    |
| 1/2 c. chopped vegetables | 1/2 a baseball |
| 1 c. of pasta or cereal   | Tennis ball    |
| 1 c. raw leafy vegetables | Baseball       |



## Banana-Orange Bran Muffins

WITH PECANS AND RAISINS

*Don't feel like measuring out a single serving of cereal in the morning? This recipe has the portion already divvied up: one muffin.*

Cooking/prep time: 45 minutes

Yield: 12 muffins

### Ingredients:

Nonstick cooking spray  
 1 c. mashed ripe bananas  
 1/2 c. frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed  
 1 egg  
 1/4 c. canola oil or light olive oil  
 1 1/2 c. bran flakes cereal  
 1 c. whole-wheat pastry flour  
 2 tsp. baking powder  
 1/4 tsp. baking soda  
 1/4 tsp. cinnamon  
 1/8 tsp. salt  
 1/2 c. raisins  
 1/4 c. toasted pecans, chopped

### Instructions:

1. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Spray 12-cup muffin tin with nonstick cooking spray and set aside.
2. In large bowl, whisk together mashed bananas, orange juice concentrate, egg and oil. Stir in bran flakes. Let sit about 15 minutes to soften cereal.
3. In separate bowl, combine flour with baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. Add to cereal mixture and stir just until combined. Gently fold in raisins and pecans.
4. Spoon batter evenly into muffin tins. Bake 20 to 25 minutes or until done. Cool 5 minutes in tin.

*Nutritional information per muffin: 176 calories, 7 g fat (<1 g saturated fat), 27 g carbohydrate, 3 g protein, 3 g dietary fiber, 175 mg sodium*  
 Source: The American Institute for Cancer Research

Massage therapy  
using hot, soothing  
stones melts your  
stress away

BY SHELLEY FLANNERY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
JEFF NEWTON

# Healing Heat

**AH, MY REGULAR MASSAGE.** I look forward to it for days on end. Sometimes I even catch myself daydreaming about it during long meetings at work or in the car on my way home from the grocery store. I can't wait to get on that table to clear my head and relax my body.

With the quiet, softly lit room, peaceful music, soft linens, and the therapist who rubs and kneads away my aches and pains, it's like a little piece of heaven. When I'm done, I feel as if I don't have a care in the world. I can go back to my daily routine feeling calmer and better about life. What could be better?

Adding hot stones, that's what.



### Hot What?

Hot stone massage is exactly what it sounds like. It's a type of massage in which the therapist utilizes hot stones to help relax the muscles. At Massage Envy, the treatment is called Hot Stone Envy, and it is a 90-minute session that includes a full-body massage along with the placement of hot, smooth stones and the use of stones during the massage by the therapist.

The stones, which are typically made of fine-grain, volcanic basalt rock because of its ability to hold heat well, come in several shapes and sizes up to about the size of your fist. They are heated in water and used as either placement or technique stones. For placement stones, they're positioned on muscle groups (with a towel or sheet between the stone and skin), and the heat from the stones penetrates the muscles, encouraging softening and relaxation.

With the technique stones, the therapist uses the stones directly on the skin during the application of massage techniques. Massaging muscles and muscle groups with the heated stones enhances relaxation, increases blood flow and decreases pain by melting away tension.

### Body Benefits

Why does hot stone massage feel so good? "The hot stones heat up the skin and relax and soften the muscles, allowing the therapist to reach deeper layers," says C.G. Funk, a licensed massage therapist and vice president of industry relations and product

*Because we care about your health: People who are prone to blood clots; have eczema, psoriasis, skin rashes or open wounds; who have recently had surgery or chemotherapy; or who are taking certain antibiotics or other prescription medications that may make the skin sensitive to heat should not have hot stone massage. Pregnant women should talk to their doctor about whether hot stone massage is safe for them.*



## Rock Recommendations

Just as with any other therapy service, the key to getting the most out of your hot stone massage is communication with your therapist. Be sure to speak up if:

- + The stones are too hot or not hot enough.
- + The stones have been placed uncomfortably or if you'd like them to be repositioned in any way.
- + The stones lose their heat and you want the therapist to rotate in hotter stones.
- + You want the therapist to use more or less pressure when massaging you with the stones.

development for Massage Envy. "This treatment is especially effective during the winter months, because muscles naturally constrict and tighten in cold weather."

Beyond just feeling incredible, hot stone massage also can help decrease chronic pain resulting from a variety of disorders and conditions. This treatment has been found to be beneficial for back pain, stress and anxiety, poor circulation, rheumatic and arthritic conditions, insomnia, depression and fibromyalgia. ❀



### Stone Specifics

*The stones used in hot stone massage are heated to temperatures up to 135 degrees, according to Massage Envy policies and procedures. They should never be placed directly on the skin except when used by the therapist in continuous motion. Stones positioned on the body are separated from the skin by a sheet or towel.*

# Break

# the Cycle

How to stop stress from slowing down your life

BY AMANDA MYERS

## IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY.

A loooooong one.

Between a big work project due tomorrow, a bill collector that seems to have your number on speed dial and a migraine that appeared while you spent 90 minutes fighting rush-hour traffic, you have barely enough strength left to find your way to the couch. Meanwhile, even contemplating going to the gym or eating a dinner that doesn't involve a take-out menu is a distant dream.

Sound familiar?

## Taking Back Your Energy

Stress bombards us all the time, and with it comes a personal drain on our energy levels. Everything from being overworked or a fear of losing our job to facing a personal tragedy or simply the every-day commitments of life can cause stress. Debbie Mandel, author of *Addicted to Stress: A Woman's 7 Step Program to Reclaim Joy and Spontaneity in Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2008), says some people crave the high they get from stress.

"Like any addiction, stress gives you a surge," explains Mandel. "Unfortunately, you crash, you get depleted, then you need a bigger fix." She says you could then face such health issues as chronic fatigue syndrome, cardiovascular issues, high blood pressure, poor eating habits and insomnia.

And even if it doesn't make you sick, stress can zap your energy. Here are some ways to break the cycle when stress starts to overtake you.

**Fill your lungs.** "Taking a few deep breaths will calm your fight-or-flight system and bring your mind and body back into balance," says Jane Foody, a registered instructor

with the Yoga Alliance. "The best thing to do is to mentally count to five as you breathe in and mentally count to five as you breathe out.

**Book a massage.** Massage does more than just relax your muscles—it can relax your mind as well, helping relieve symptoms of stress. That's because massage releases endorphins that calm your nervous system. Research studies show massage therapy actually boosts the body's immune system, which can become compromised from extended periods of stress.

**Be contagious.** "Goodness and happiness are contagious, and a bad mood is contagious," says Mandel. Surround yourself with supportive, happy people. Even if stress makes you want to hibernate, "being isolated is a recipe for disaster," adds Mandel. "Friends are your best therapists."

**Get moving.** Exercise is one of the best ways to alleviate anxiety and get your endorphins pumping—those "feel good" chemicals your body produces when you go for a bike ride or hop on the treadmill. If you can't muster an hour a day, start with a brisk 15-minute walk outside with your dog, and move up from there.

**Giggle.** "We take ourselves very seriously," says Mandel, who encourages people to reinterpret stressful moments in their day with a more comedic take. Learn to laugh off what you can't control. Or, try "movie therapy," she suggests. "Watch comedies until you laugh ... or cry," she says, noting that both results are good releases.

**Get it out.** Sometimes, it all makes sense on paper. "Get a journal and write in it," says Foody, who suggests jotting down your jumble of thoughts as a way to blow off steam. "Gain insight on what's happening in your life and how you can possibly change it for the better." ❀

*A Moment of Silence*  
Practice full body relaxation once per day for at least five minutes. Start by lying down on your back in a comfortable position. Now, close your eyes and scan your body for tensions and stress. Relax your jaw, your shoulders and continue to relax your whole body progressively.





## Serious Stress

Stress can be fleeting or it can be chronic, depending on its cause. But it's important to watch the warning signs that it may be turning into something more severe, such as depression.

If any of the following feelings do not go away or interfere with your daily life, consider seeking a professional's help:

- >> Sadness
- >> Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- >> Change in weight
- >> Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- >> Energy loss
- >> Feelings of worthlessness
- >> Thoughts of death or suicide



## Laugh It Up

Exercise your funny bone by finding humor and spreading it around

**THEY SAY LAUGHTER** is the best medicine ... yet it's also contagious. Who are *they* exactly, and why are they trying to confuse us?

Okay, that was a lame attempt at a humorous icebreaker. Now that said ice is indeed broken, let's get serious about laughter. You know a giggle feels good and a from-the-gut guffaw is even better, but can laughing really be good for you? You bet your whoopee cushion!

Numerous studies have shown both the mental and physical benefits of a good laugh, according to Brad Nieder, M.D., general practitioner/comedian. Nieder shares a healthy dose of humor and wellness advice with the many audiences he entertains across the country as "The Healthy Humorist."

"Laughing reduces cortisol, that fight-or-flight stress hormone in our blood, and produces a relaxing and calming effect," says Nieder. "It also promotes

IgA and T-cell activity, the immune cells that protect us from illness.” Recent research shows that even the *anticipation* of laughter—that something funny is about to happen—can also reduce stress.

These days, it can seem as if there’s not much funny to be found, yet it’s needed more than ever. Here are some ideas to help you add a little joy to your world—and put a smile on the faces of your loved ones.

### Watch it

Enjoy a funny movie or a favorite sitcom with your family. While a chuckle in front of the TV can’t fix everything, it can certainly lighten your load. “Worries about jobs and mortgages and credit cards are a big deal, and watching a comedy won’t solve those problems,” says Nieder. “But an opportunity to escape and enjoy a little levity can help provide a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel.”

### Get into the act

Treat your family or friends to an improvisational or stand-up comedy show. Feeling particularly brave? Visit on amateur night and try your hand at cracking others up. If you can’t take the whole gang out, create your own comedy routines at home. Who didn’t stage elaborate productions for friends and relatives when they were kids? Show your offspring how it’s done, and then let them entertain you.



### Give yourself props

Keep items around you that make you smile, like a funny picture from your last vacation or a goofy toy you can pass around with your co-workers. “I have daily ritual with a page-a-day humor calendar. It’s my morning laughter pill,” says Nieder.

### Find the humor, pass it on

Just like our other individual tastes, everyone’s sense of humor is unique. But there’s plenty to laugh at all around us. “Turn on your radar and find the absurdities in everyday life,” says Nieder. “It’s out there waiting to make you laugh.” Once you find your funny place, spread the laughter. It’ll come back to you.—By Allison Thomas

## Fake It Till You Feel It

Laughter is great, but what if you’re not feeling particularly amused? No problem, says physician and humorist Brad Nieder, M.D. “You don’t have to mean it. Just the act of laughter, even if you’re faking it, can have benefits.”

This concept is a guiding principle behind Laughter Yoga—yep, you heard that right. Madan Kataria, M.D., founded *Laughter Yoga* as an exercise that blends laughter and yogic breathing into a wellness workout. How do you do it?

1. Gather a group of people, seated together.
2. Start laughing.

Deep breathing exercises are performed between bouts of laughter to enhance its effect. Yes, it all sounds goofy and more than a little uncomfortable, but the premise is that forced laughter will turn into the real thing.

And it seems as though it has:

Kataria started with just five participants in a public park in 1995. Today, there are more than 6,000 laughter clubs around the world, including 280 in the U.S.

### Giggle with a Group

Can you really laugh for no reason? Laughter Yoga founder Madan Kataria, M.D., believes so, and points to the ways that children laugh simply by amusing themselves. As we grow and learn to “behave,” spontaneous laughter can be lost. Get your laugh back: Join a Laughter Yoga club in your area—they’re free—or start your own. Visit [laughteryoga.org](http://laughteryoga.org) to learn how.

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