

IT ALL STARTS

WITH A

SMILE

7

Steps  
To Being  
Happier  
Right Now



the LAUGH DOCTOR™

Clifford Kuhn, M.D.

*This book has not been a solitary enterprise. Every page reflects the input and guidance of friends and patients too numerous to mention individually. Nonetheless, I am grateful to each of you.*

*Special thanks go to my business and marketing guru, Deborah Lanore, without whose energy, vision and perseverance there would be no book.*

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# Introduction

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The middle-aged CEO sat dejectedly in my consulting room. It was mid-morning, but he had the look of a weary man who had already put in a full day's work. His attire reflected expensive tastes and the wealth to indulge them.

"I thought when I got to this point in life I'd be happy," he said hoarsely. "I'm making more money than I ever imagined. I've got three homes, a beautiful wife, great kids and expensive toys I can't even find the time to play with.

"I'm a successful man," he insisted. "I should be free to do whatever I want. But I can't get free. I have no time to enjoy any of it. It feels like I'm on a treadmill and I can't get off. I'm trapped by my success and I'm not happy."

Tears welled up in his eyes. Embarrassed, he looked furtively around my office. "Where the hell are your tissues?" he grumbled. "You're a shrink, for God's sake. Surely you have a tissue."

"Do you want a new one or a used one?" I asked.

He looked at me sharply.

"The new ones cost extra," I said, keeping a straight face.

He looked confused. Then I saw a light of recognition in his eyes, and he burst into a laugh that lasted longer than my silly joke warranted. When he caught his breath, he had a very different kind of tears in his eyes.

“That’s the first good laugh I’ve had this week,” he said. “I used to laugh all the time. That’s what’s missing!”

“Sounds like you’re not having any fun,” I ventured.

“Damn right! That’s why I’m here. You’re the Laugh Doctor, after all. I want you to fix me.”

I am the laugh doctor, a psychiatrist who for decades now has researched humor’s physiological and psychological powers. A professor and former Associate Chairman of the University of Louisville Medical School’s Department of Psychiatry, I have studied the healing effects of laughter from an academic perspective, from my own medical case studies, and from working (and playing) with such world famous humor practitioners as comedian Jerry Lewis, Dr. Patch Adams, about whose life a successful movie has been made, Allen Klein, best-selling author and past president of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic humor, Dr. Steve Wilson, the founder and guiding spirit of The World Laughter Tour, and “Doc Hollywood” himself, Dr. Neil Shulman.

This research has enabled me to develop my own highly successful HA HA HA Prescription, which is designed to capitalize on laughter’s ability to heal, and to witness the beneficial effects of the HA HA HA Prescription in my medical practice. I have had the pleasure, for example, of accompanying one patient, “Judy,” on a triumphant fun-filled trip months after her predicted death from a recurrent untreatable cancer. I have rejoiced with another patient, “Robert”—a previously serious person—who, given only a 50 percent chance of surviving five years with his tumor, dedicated himself to daily laughter and recently celebrated his fifteenth cancer-free year.

We know that humor’s natural healing power lies in its ability to quickly and effectively dissipate stress, the number one destroyer of human health. Medical studies have demonstrated that stress causes high blood pressure, muscle tension, and even suppresses the

body's immune system.

Laughter and the positive emotions laughter generates, on the other hand, have been found to boost the immune system, stabilize blood pressure, massage inner organs, stimulate circulation, and increase the flow of oxygen to the muscles, thereby decreasing tension.

How, then, do we go about generating more laughter in our lives? How can people maintain a sense of humor when they are fearful or depressed, anxious, physically uncomfortable, over worked, in pain, or uncertain about the future?

I have an answer—my HA HA HA Prescription, a three-phase formula for unleashing the marvelous healing power of your humor nature in every situation. The three HA'S stand for Humor Attitude, Humor Aptitude, and Humor Action. Followed in proper order, they are the keys to restoring the full measure of this natural medicine. The book will guide you through this sequence.

Section I will focus on adjusting your humor attitude, which creates the foundation for lifelong benefits. You will see how you have come to disparage and even trivialize humor, and then find ample support and lots of encouragement for adopting a more respectful disposition toward your most magnificent gift.

Section II deals with the rediscovery of your natural ability to have fun. You will be happy to find that you have not lost your inborn talent for humor, despite, in some cases, years of neglect and misuse. Nothing new will be required, but you may have to brush a few cobwebs off some things you once knew and have since forgotten. Like riding a bicycle, your ability to have fun will return once you work to bring it back, and you will forget you ever lost it.

Finally, Section III will teach you specific activities that are designed to enhance the presence of fun and laughter in your life, so that you can enjoy the benefits any time and anywhere. You will be introduced to the tactics used by successful comedy professionals

to release humor's energy, and keep it fresh and strong day after day. You will see that you don't have to be a "comedian" yourself to put these tactics into practice. They are guaranteed to work for you because they will be rooted in the strong foundation of your newly revitalized humor attitude and aptitude.

Do you know what it would take to make you happy? Do you think you could achieve the success you yearn for in your personal relations and in your work? Are you still searching for the joy and satisfaction you once envisioned for yourself, or have you given up hope of ever finding it?

People tell me that answering such questions honestly makes them uncomfortable. Many say they have tried so many elusive remedies they wonder whether anything could truly make them happy. Some have become disillusioned and frustrated by their inability to achieve personal or professional success. Others feel stymied by bad health. The fact is, increasing numbers of Americans today report dissatisfaction and lack of fulfillment in their work and a lack of joy in their lives.

We seem to have become a distressed and desperate people. The harder we strive to feel better about ourselves, the more discouraged we become when we can't capture that elusive state of mind.

This book is written to resolve that dilemma and to help us claim the health and vitality of a joy-filled existence. I guarantee its success. Read it and practice the seven steps it teaches and you will encounter a life of increased optimism, energy, and resilience. I am proud to share this life changing information with people all over the world. Its rapid success formula is just what the doctor ordered.

So, let's get started!



# Step One: Diagnose the Problem

---

On his seventieth birthday, a man decided he wanted to live for a long time. He started to diet and exercise, and gave up smoking. He lost his gut, his body firmed up, and, to make the picture complete, he bought a toupee to cover his bald scalp.

Then he walked out in the street and was hit by the first car that came along.

As he lay dying, he called up, “God, how could you do this to me?”

God answered, “To tell you the truth, I didn’t recognize you!”

Did you think that was funny? Did you laugh a little? Did you smile? Did you at least get a gleam in your eye or exhale an appreciative grunt? If so, you have just inoculated yourself against America’s #1 threat to health: Stress.

Last year alone stress cost America more than 300 billion dollars in lost human productivity. At least 80 percent of the complaints you are bringing to your physician’s office are stress induced or stress related. Every disease that is considered life threatening—cancer, heart disease, depression, etc.—has stress at its core. We are in a full-fledged epidemic of stress!

As you will learn later in this chapter, that smile, laugh, giggle, gleam or even appreciative grunt you just issued is the most powerful antidote to stress. But before we can discuss the cure, we need to understand the scope of the problem.

Stress is so rampant and ubiquitous that I have dubbed it the modern “black plague.” Because it is so widespread, there is the very real danger that you will accept stress as a “normal” component of your modern lifestyle. We see evidence of this as we banter about such terms as “workplace stress,” “eustress” (meaning stress that promotes constructive action), and “normal everyday stress.”

I want to take an unequivocal and unflinching stand right now: ***There is no such thing as normal or acceptable stress!*** All stress is pathological and destructive, and thus the only constructive goal is its complete and total elimination. If you accept the notion that some stress is necessary and inevitable in your life, you have already succumbed to the epidemic and are probably suffering some of its consequences.

The cornerstone of all effective treatment plans—the basic tenet of all medicine, wherever it is practiced around the world—is an accurate diagnosis. Therefore, it is not enough to simply say that stress is the biggest enemy of your health and success. We must be more precise in illuminating the cause of the problem.

## • FIND THE CAUSE •

As devastating as it is to your personal and corporate “health,” stress, after all, is just a symptom—a signal or an alarm that exists to call attention to a potentially *more serious underlying problem*. We doctors consider it a mistake to treat a symptom, no matter how discomfiting it may be, until its true cause is identified and understood. Symptomatic treatment, without a “deeper” diagnosis, usually proves to be inadequate and in many cases dangerous, in that it may permit a continuing undetected proliferation of the underlying problem, to the further detriment of the patient.

Think of it this way: If the smoke alarm in your home goes off, would you: