

# LET'S TALK WELLNESS.



SUNCOR  
ENERGY  
FOUNDATION

by Erica Lamontagne

## Laughing all the way to good health

We all have stresses in our everyday lives that can sometimes start to weigh us down. Have you ever noticed how a night out filled with friends and laughter can make you feel much better after the daily grind? Worldwide laughter clubs are based on the connection between good health and laughter, and there is one located right here in Fort McMurray to help residents feel great and laugh away their stresses. Heather Thomas is a Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher with the Fort McMurray Laughter Club and she reminds us that, "seven days without laughter makes one weak."

### WHAT IS LAUGHTER YOGA?

Laughter Yoga is "laughing for no reason," says Thomas. "It's non-religious, non-political, and non-stereotyping." In 1995, Dr. Madan Kataria, a physician, developed laughter yoga in India. He realized the health benefits of laughter, but since he could not prescribe joy or laughter, he developed clubs for this purpose. Today, there are more than 6000 laughter clubs around the world with hundreds of thousands of members.

Laughter yoga is physical. It uses tension-releasing laughter exercises, deep breathing, and stretching techniques. The group simulates laughter until it becomes real and infectious when practiced within the group. The exercises are adapted to meet the abilities of the participants, but they all reap the benefits. The chuckle of an elderly man can be as effective as the roaring laughter of a teenager.



### HOW DOES LAUGHTER BENEFIT WELLNESS?

The main benefit of Laughter Yoga comes in the form of stress relief. "It is extremely good for physical and mental well-being," Thomas says. "Endorphins are released during laughter, which help to improve mood and reduce depression and anxiety." She continues to say that when you are laughing, you are intensely in the present. Since worry is about the future and guilt is about the past, you are not thinking about either of those while laughing. Moreover, endorphins are natural pain relievers, so laughter can help to reduce pain.

Laughter also has cardiovascular benefits similar to aerobic exercise. It stimulates the heart and blood circulation while providing a massage of your internal organs as it exercises your abdominal muscles. Laughter can also alleviate bronchitis and asthma due to improved lung capacity and oxygen levels in the blood.

In general, laughter "helps with insomnia, it makes your eyes shine, it gives a healthy glow to your face and makes you look younger..., it boosts your immune system, [and] it increases your self-esteem and confidence." With a reduction in stress, participants may notice better sleep patterns, a more positive outlook, and an increased sense of overall wellbeing.

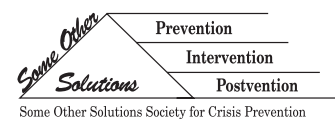
### HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Currently, four people are certified to lead laughter yoga in Fort McMurray. The Laughter Club meets outdoors every month during the summer, and is searching for an indoor venue for their winter sessions.

Anyone who is interested in becoming a certified leader or participating in the health benefits of Laughter Yoga can contact Heather Thomas at 780-715-9447, or [info@anandacenter.ca](mailto:info@anandacenter.ca). Thomas also reminds people that, "laughter is free, so there is no fee!"

[www.someothersolutions.ca](http://www.someothersolutions.ca)

Watch for the Let's Talk Wellness Series on CTV Fort McMurray



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