

# Laughter therapy

The baby is teething, the elder son is on a rampage and the dinner has just burnt, so I hardly feel like chuckling as I walk into the Darebin Laughter Group

**B**ut of course, it also means that I really need to roll around with my sides splitting from mad laughter.

The first person I meet in the hall at the Jika Jika Community Centre in Melbourne is a jovial woman with brightly colored tints in her hair, and feel better already.

Gilliana del Alectos is the facilitator of the Darebin Laughter Group and I don't envy her. I can't imagine how the group of men and women gathering this Wednesday evening are going to have a worthy hiccup, much less an all-out bellow.

To start, we stand in a circle and loosen our bodies with exercises before pretending to jump puddles and open imaginary umbrellas. Not so hard. It's not so challenging moving around with a bunch of strangers – slowly and gently – for someone as self-conscious as myself.

Mimicking various animals such as

lions and cobras comes next. I enjoy pretending to laugh while mimicking a kookaburra, then become surprised by some real chuckles from a participant instantly creating a chain reaction of giggles. Walking around showing people that “the fish is this big”, then how small, sets off another person. Zooming around on motorbikes and aeroplanes and pretending to be a Jack in the Box heightens the laughs and even produces my own giggles. However, nothing gets me above a creative chuckle until the end, when I am just about to give up.

The one that throws me over the edge is a monkey. Hopping around scratching armpits and screeching at the other contorting, wide-eyed monkeys – everyone knowing this was utterly ridiculous – creates an explosion that starts somewhere in my belly and roars out in a great sound.

I am laughing.

In fact, I am bellowing – daintily

mind you. I automatically try to suppress it (I only met these people an hour ago) but can't stop a second hoot escaping. Oh what the heck. I laugh for the rest of the session and by the end, am feeling upbeat and relaxed.

Everything I look at or think about afterwards seems brighter than usual. This feeling lasts for a day or two and just knowing that I can laugh if I want to has made a subtle difference to me in moments of difficulties.

Is that the dinner burning again? Oh, tee hee, so it is. **NH**

For more information, contact Gilliana del Alectos on (03) 9499 7373 or visit

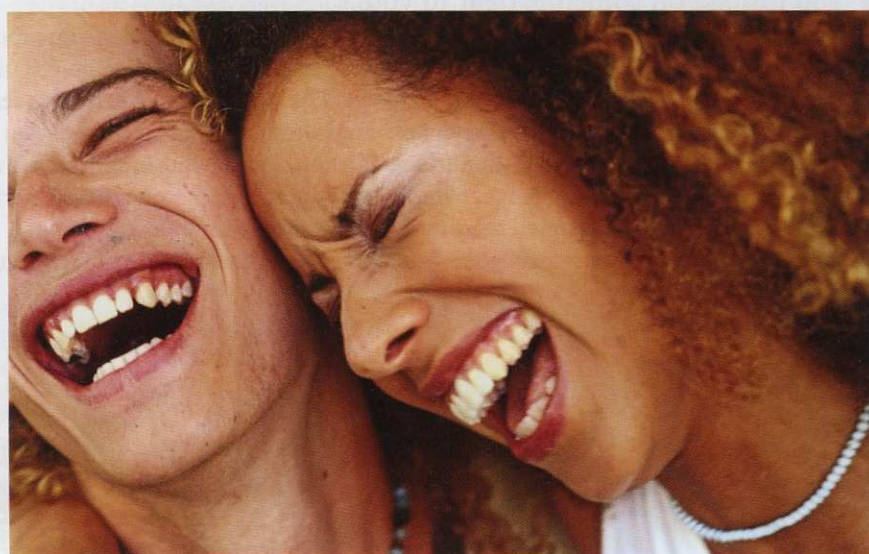
## History

Madan Kataria, a doctor in India who wanted to build a positive manifestation for world peace through laughter, first started the laughter clubs. The Laughter Yoga movement has grown to over 5000 laughter clubs on five continents.

## Benefits

- Stimulates the mind
- Reduces blood pressure
- Strengthens the immune system
- Oxygenates the blood
- Exercises your respiratory system
- Helps you tone up (true, laughing is quite an exercise workout)
- Produces endorphins, which reduces pain and induces pleasure

Costs: Free or by donation.



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