

One morning, as I marched wildly on the StairMaster, I caught a glimpse of something flashing red on the treadmill ahead of me. A smile broke over my sweat-drenched face when I discovered a man running in red silk boxers. It's true! For a few fleeting moments, as I watched Mr. Boxers jogging at a steady pace, I forgot about my tired legs, my sore arms, and my lack of breath. I'm

sure he was oblivious to the positive impact he'd made on my workout. Then I began to laugh at myself, remembering

how I strutted awkwardly on the elliptical in my stocking feet one day I'd forgotten my gym shoes. At the end of my workout, I felt grateful that humor spontaneously found me when I needed it most!

Now, more than ever, we find ourselves seeking new ways to keep our attitudes fresh and our spirits high amid chronic bad news and bleak prospects. When dealing with circumstances beyond our control, fear can make us feel vulnerable and even helpless. But the truth is, we're far from helpless. When coping with the stress of daily life, we have the ability to make positive choices for our bodies and our minds. Exercise and laughter have great power to restore optimism. This dynamic duo can offset the negative impact of stress and shake away the pessimistic mindset that can block our happiness.

Exercise keeps us physically and mentally fit, and therefore agile and ready to adapt as we face the unknown. A decision to follow an exercise routine is a decision to strengthen our bodies and our psyches at the same time. And, laughter is a wonderful distraction from the heaviness in our lives that we cannot avoid or conquer.

One of laughter's great benefits is the power to change your attitude toward a persistent problem. Having a sense of humor and sharing laughter creates a positive emotional state and sense of connection with others. Couldn't we all use a little more of that?

Research continues to prove the endless

positive effects of exercise on our bodies and minds, including decreasing depression and anxiety.

Likewise, studies have been done on the multiple benefits of laughter. One study by Robert Provine, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Maryland, shows that we change physiologically when we laugh. Whether you bust a move or bust your gut laughing, your body reaps

the following benefits:

- Increased blood flow: Laughter raises your pulse and blood pressure – just like

exercise – sending more oxygen to your muscles and organs and leaving you better off physically and mentally.

- Improved immune response: Stress can curb the effectiveness of the body's immune system. Exercise and laughter boost levels of immunity and infection-fighting antibodies, especially important for the coming change in season.
- A good night's rest: Regular exercise enhances our ability to relax and promotes healthy sleep patterns. A life strong in laughter has the same perks.

- Burns calories: 10-15 minutes of laughter can burn 50 calories, but don't skip your cardio class to watch Comedy Central!

The best way to burn calories is a 35–60 minute workout complete with blood, sweat, and tears. And maybe you can laugh about it later.

In addition, active individuals are remarkably more optimistic than inactive ones. And, personal optimism correlates with high self-esteem and a positive sense of well being. When we challenge ourselves to engage in physical activity and use our sense of humor, our outlook brightens and our spirits lift.

Spring is here! It's the perfect time to renew our commitment to our self-care and actively pursue the simple things that bring us hope and happiness. A good sweat and a good guffaw undeniably make life better.

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Exercise and Laughter: The Perfect Stimulus Package

By Michelle DeCola, L.C.P.C.

