



Laughter is wonderful. It makes us feel better, improves our health, and even fights disease.

### **What is a Laugh?**

Ho-Ho-Ho, Merry Christmas! Most people know the jolly laugh of Santa Clause. His rosy cheeks turn into a happy expression (that takes 15 muscles to do), air flows into his lungs, he moves his arms and grabs his round tummy, bends his legs, and lets out a loud, happy sound that shakes his body. Laughter is a combination of these two things: 1) movement, and 2) sound – from a giggle to a snort to a loud ha-ha-ha or ho-ho-ho.

### **What Makes us Laugh?**

There are several theories about what makes us laugh. Here are a few:

- Someone tells a story and we think we know how it will end and it ends in a different way. The different ending is what makes a joke funny.
- Someone makes a mistake or has misfortune or acts stupidly. We laugh because we think we are superior.
- After a tense experience, like a scary movie scene, an actor says something mild at just the right time, and we laugh to release tension or because we are nervous.
- People also laugh at things they have in common, like the community or culture they come from.
- Children, tweens, teens and grown ups have different tastes and laugh at different things.

### **Laughter as Medicine**

No Joke. Laughter is good medicine. Harry L. Gewanter, the director of pediatric rheumatology at Children's Hospital in Richmond, Virginia said laughter is one of the best ways to cause positive emotions in a negative situation.

Laughing releases endorphins (**in DORF inz**) – hormones that act as natural pain killers and make us feel good - and helps improve the immune system – those natural killer cells that help destroy tumors and viruses. These hormones stay elevated for a while after we quit laughing. Laughing also lowers our blood pressure and slows down our heart rate. That is exactly the opposite of how stress affects our bodies. Researchers believe that laughing 100 times is as healthy as exercising for 10-15 minutes.

Laughter isn't learned – our bodies just know how to do it. People who cannot see or hear laughing know how to laugh. And laughter can be contagious. When we hear someone laughing, it can cause our brains to cause us to laugh too, and make the people around us feel relaxed. Try it the next time you're with friends. Pretend to laugh really hard and loud for a few minutes. Soon you'll all be laughing for real.

Laughter is a lot of fun, and it's good for you. Keep laughing – and sing along with the HealthRock™ song *Laugh*.