Laughter is good medicine

*Kris Jenkins, Human Development Specialist

In a recent magazine, a top executive said, “Laughter in the work place is a waste of time. There is no time to indulge in the luxury of humor.”

Some researchers beg to differ with his somber opinion. According to Kris Jenkins, MU Extension human development specialist, “Research has shown that laughter is essential to your well-being and proves that not enough laughter could be hazardous to your health.” Scientists have learned that smiles and laughter stimulate the brain to secrete chemicals which seem to stimulate healing, increase happiness and reduce pain. Laughter can provide muscle relaxation, release from anger and fear, stress reduction, prevention of heart disease, reduction in headaches and anxiety.

In a series of studies at Loma Linda University in California, people exposed to regular doses of humor showed a significant increase in their immune system. While stress can weaken immune systems, humor strengthens them.

Add these tried and true humor tips to your life:

■ Seek out humor. If certain friends or family make you laugh, find reasons to be around them.

■ Surround yourself with humor. Post cartoons around the house to improve your mood.

■ Laugh at yourself. Don’t take yourself too seriously. Lighten your attitudes about yourself and your anxieties will become lighter also.

■ Don’t worry or analyze why people laugh—just appreciate. Think funny. Look for the humorous side of an otherwise difficult situation.

■ Be open to silly things. Humor the child within yourself.

■ Laugh with others for what they do rather than for what they are.

Humorist, Bennett Cerf believed that humor is nonsensical and individual and exists only in the mind. As he said, ”Humor is like bad taste in clothing—there is no accounting for it.” Make time for humor today.

Creative Living is written by University of Missouri Extension Regional Specialists for seniors in English and Spanish. This newsletter is a partnership among the Guadalupe Center, Alzheimer’s Association, and University of Missouri Extension. If you have any suggestions for its content, please contact Nina Chen, Ph.D., Human Development Specialist, 816-252-5051.

*Spanish translation provided by Kelly Loeb through Support of Alzheimer’s Association.