

Reasons to Smile

When we feel great, a smile comes naturally. It's an outward sign of joy, happiness, appreciation, amusement, excitement, or contentment.

It's not natural to smile when we're sad or upset. But it turns out that smiling might be the best thing to do when you're ready to shift into a brighter mood.

Fake It Till You Make It:

Our body language can influence our emotions. In one study, researchers discovered that people who stood in a confident way actually felt more confident. In another study, people who intentionally put on a facial expression (like a smile or a frown) ended up feeling the emotion that went with it.

Here's the best part: A smile helps you feel happier – and being happier helps you keep the smile going in a genuine way. Your fake smile is now a real one!

Smile Like You Mean It

There's just one trick to making smiling work for you: You need to do it right. A true, genuine smile is called a Duchenne smile. It uses all the muscles in the face, including the "laugh lines" around your eyes. Engaging all these muscles is important, even in a fake smile. If you're smiling on purpose to help your mood, you want to smile until your cheeks lift and you feel your laugh lines crinkle. You can see how it feels by holding a pencil horizontally between your teeth as you smile.

Smiling and Laughing Reduce Stress:

Since body language and mood are so linked, it makes sense that laughing on purpose helps us too.

Smiling relaxes the facial muscles and calms the nervous system. Laughing sends more oxygen to the brain. That triggers the release of brain chemicals called endorphins. These chemicals help us feel positive. Laughing can lower blood pressure, relieve stress, and boost mood.

Here's a simple exercise from Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh to help you tap into the benefits of smiling:

As you breathe in, say to yourself:
Breathing in, I calm body and mind.
Then, as you breathe out, think:
Breathing out, I smile.

By repeating this simple breathing exercise several times, you're relaxing your nervous system and countering stress.

Smiling Helps Us Bond With Others

Just like "fake" smiling, "fake" laughing turns into spontaneous real laughter, and it's contagious. Try this: Get a group together. It can be your family, classmates, or teammates. Have everyone do some fake laughing. Now see if you can keep a straight face!

Some people tap into the relaxing power of laughing in a group setting by doing a kind of yoga called laughter yoga.

Because smiling and laughing are contagious, they help people bond. Smiling sends a friendly signal that usually results in the other person smiling back. One important purpose of smiling might be that it creates social bonds. Scientists have even found that we connect in a physical way when we share a smile or a positive emotion. Our breathing and heart rates sync up, bringing powerful benefits to our health and well-being.



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