

The Social Glue of **Laughing**

By Kevin Fritz

Laughter yoga brings people together to live happier and healthier lives.

Combining a trend and a revered emotion, Laughter Yoga is gaining a foothold in social circles.

Pat Conklin of **Dr. Phillips**, a certified laughter yoga instructor who launched Laughter Yoga Orlando three years ago, holds a class in the Orange Tree Recreation Center, attracting approximately a dozen students per week.

Conklin says there are significant health benefits to Laughter Yoga, both physical and mental. The laughing elements in class are aerobic, which work the muscles in the face, heart, lungs, diaphragm, and abdomen. She calls it the “no-crunch abdominal workout.” Besides, it’s a natural way of bringing people together. “Laughter is social glue,” she says. “People gravitate toward laughter. It’s contagious.”

Laughter Yoga is also a form of meditation, allowing participants to leave their worries behind. Conklin notes that laughter transforms the body by releasing endorphins, which are the body’s natural painkillers. “It’s the biochemistry of joy,” she says. “It helps you cope with stress. It lifts the mood and makes you feel good.”

According to Conklin, Laughter Yoga consists of four elements: clapping in rhythm; breathing exercises (the true yoga component); child-like playfulness; and laughter exercises. Her class then transitions into spontaneous laughter (without the use of laughter exercises) and ends with guided relaxation.

Susan Antonovich of Dr. Phillips says when she heard of Conklin’s class three years ago, it was something she really needed to explore.

“I was going through a lot at the time,” she explains. “The class offers stress relief and a feel-good sense I can take with me throughout the week.” She adds that the relaxation techniques at the end of each practice can easily be incorporated into everyday life.

Monica Leibacher, a licensed medical therapist, joined the group because she is always looking to try something new, especially



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Certified Laughter Yoga instructor Pat Conklin laughs it up.

if it has a health benefit. Leibacher also felt she needed to be a lighter person and not take things so serious.

“I was leaving the supermarket recently and it was raining hard. Everyone was standing around looking sad. I just ran to my car laughing the whole time. I got soaked. It was great. That is something I have learned to do, to take advantage and laugh about things. It has given me a whole new outlook.”

Conklin has not always been one with a positive, fun outlook either. Only a few years ago, she was a grant writer, a high-pressure, deadline intensive job that left her little time for fun. Then things got worse. She developed chronic shoulder pain and found herself caring for aging parents in Washington, D.C. After her father died, Conklin was forced to get a night job to support her mom and pay the mounting bills incurred from caring for her parents. She slipped into depression, a lost soul brought on by stress and life’s realities.

For Conklin, Laughter Yoga changed the person she used to be, morphing from a super-serious grant writer and quiet individual to a Laughter Yoga instructor teaching others how to be happy.

“The day I discovered laughter, everything changed,” she says. “It even changed the way I think. It gave me hope.” **L**

For more information on Laughter Yoga, visit our website at CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.