

Laughter Yoga Club offers residents health benefits, stress relief

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Stuck in traffic?

Just laugh, says local certified laughter yoga leaders.

"If you're wanting to laugh, there are a lot of reasons to do it, whether something's funny or not," said Craig Whitley of southwest Cherokee, a certified laughter yoga leader. "Instead of getting angry if you are caught in traffic, just laugh.

You're going to feel better, and it's a great way to make more productive use of time in a car."



Whitley and his wife, Helen, lead the Woodstock Laughter Yoga Club at Golden Age Fitness in Woodstock. The new club encourages adults to laugh more for better health.

The club meets at noon Mondays and 7 p.m. Tuesdays. The club is open to the public and there is no cost to attend.

Dr. Madan Kataria of India founded the laughter yoga club movement. There are more than 5,000 laughter clubs around the world.

Whitley, who also is a life coach and hypnotherapist, said the club is based on the principle of "acting happiness."

"Your body doesn't know the difference between when you're acting happy and actually happy," he said. "It's a way for folks to come for 40 minutes or so and just act like a kid and laugh and feel great and get the various benefits while enjoying a group setting also."

Whitley said he thinks there is a need for the club, especially since research has shown that as adults get older, they do not laugh as much as when they were children.

"If you turn on the news, it's so negative. We have an epidemic of seriousness in this country," he said. "You can know what's going on in the world and still enjoy a happy day."

Whitley said laughing could help people feel good for a while.

"When you're feeling less than happy, put a big smile on your face and hold it, and you'll notice it's harder to keep the negative feelings in place because you're sending your brain a different message when you smile or laugh," he said. "My advice would be to anyone: Smile, breathe, laugh a lot, and you'll feel better."

Mrs. Whitley, a licensed clinical social worker and therapist in private practice who also is a certified laughter yoga leader, said the club helps to lower the stress hormone levels, as well as with depression and social anxiety.

"When you come in you're going to be silly, and it reduces inhibitions in people who are anxious. As a therapist, we really want to help people in every way we can," she said. "Laughing matters, and we take laughter seriously."

Mrs. Whitley, who said she got interested in laughter yoga after taking a class last summer when she was burnt out, said encouraging world peace through laughter is a mission of the club.

"Laughing feels good," she said. "Put on a happy face' like our grandparents told us to do really is true. It really does help to put on a happy face even if we're not happy. We think we're happy when we put that happy face on."

The Whitleys lead classes for free, as well as paid events such as for corporations and businesses.

"We're not just in it for (money) because we're also people who have at times suffered from over seriousness," he said.

During the laughter yoga session on Monday, participants did laughing exercises such as acting like they were penguins, on cell phones, throwing a "hot potato" and having ice thrown down their backs. All the while, they were laughing. Stretching also was a part of the session.

John Uher of Woodstock said his blood pressure has dropped due to the club.

"It's terrific," he said of the club. "It makes your life easier, lighter and more optimistic."

"It makes you feel good," Lou Davis of Marietta said. "It creates good energy."

Donna Kemmerer of Woodstock said the club makes her happy.

"It's a nice stress reliever," she said. "The more you smile the more you realize the world will smile back at you."

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