

“Laughter yoga eased my pain!”

When *plantar fasciitis* and *sciatica* pain were crippling Alexa Fong Drubay’s life, she discovered that laughter really *is* the best medicine!

Alexa Fong Drubay was enjoying an afternoon hike with her husband near their Media, Pennsylvania, home when, suddenly, her *sciatica* flared up. As stabbing pain ran down the back of her right leg, Alexa stopped. But she didn’t turn back.

Instead, Alexa focused on the most painful spot, rubbing it as if she was applying a healing cream...and began to *laugh*. It may sound strange, but Alexa had been practicing “laughter yoga” to ease her flare-ups...and within minutes, the sharp pain was gone and she was back on the trail.

“Laughter really *is* the best medicine,” Alexa marveled, high-fiving her husband.

The power of joy

Alexa was introduced to laughter yoga when her cousin led a session at a 2010 family reunion. As they all sat in a circle, they were instructed to greet one another with laughter. As contagious laughter

reverberated through the room, Alexa was amazed that she felt energized and less stressed. Alexa was so impressed, she eventually decided to immerse herself in laughter yoga and traveled to India to study with

its creator, Dr. Madan Kataria.

“Laughter yoga doesn’t involve traditional yoga poses,” explained Dr. Kataria at her first class.

“Instead, students participate in bursts of laughter, interspersed with breath work, concluding with a relaxing guided meditation.” Alexa and her classmates sat in a

circle, and Dr. Kataria led them in a series of laughter exercises—they would sing silly songs and chant “ho, ho, ha, ha, ha!”

After a few 30-second exercises, they relaxed and did deep breathing. Dr. Kataria explained that deep breathing allowed them to draw more oxygen into the body for cellular growth and renewal, and it’s great for the arteries, lungs, heart and brain, boosting *oxytocin*, *serotonin* and *endorphin* levels, while reducing *cortisol*, a stress hormone.

Following the two-week course, Alexa became a master trainer and returned



“Laughter worked wonders for my body and mind!” says Alexa

“Laughter produces painkilling opiates in your brain”

—Scott Haltzman, M.D.

home to start her own laughter yoga club. Alexa loved helping others reap the emotional benefits of laughter, and in 2017, when she developed sharp pain from *plantar fasciitis* in her foot, she discovered it had physical healing powers too.

Remembering what Dr. Kataria said about laughter yoga triggering a surge in *endorphins*, lowering stress and pain, Alexa began focusing on the pain during her sessions and was amazed by the relief she experienced. So much so that when, a year and a half later, her *sciatica* nerve pain began to flare, Alexa once again laughed it away.

Today, Alexa, 58, finds laughter yoga also calms her during this uncertain and stressful time. And she offers sessions on Zoom and online (LaughterYogaWithAlexa.com) to help others find peace. “Laughter yoga is empowerment through mindfulness,” she explains. “It improves your happiness and your health!” —Risa Doherty

3 surprising and powerful ways laughter heals

✓ **Improves immunity:** Laughing with friends for 30 minutes on the phone or via video chat produces the immunity-boosting hormones *serotonin* and *dopamine*, which can lower your risk of catching a viral illness by 67%, say scientists at Carnegie Mellon University.

✓ **Eases pain:** Tuning in to watch your favorite sitcom immediately boosts pain tolerance to slash muscle and joint aches by 50%, report UCLA researchers. Says psychiatrist Scott Haltzman, M.D., “Laughter prods your brain to produce painkilling opiates.”

✓ **Increases energy:** University of Nebraska researchers report that laughing boosts energy by 75%! “Laughter eases tension and fatigue by reducing levels of *cortisol*,” says Daniel Amen, M.D., who suggests cuing up a silly YouTube video.

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