

# Why So Serious? Finding Humor To Be Well

## By Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT

I love reading books on health, healing and being well. Indeed, discovering wellness for myself and helping others on their own journeys to wellness has become my life's work.

Ready for a new book and new lessons on wellness, I took the escalator to the third floor of the Barnes & Noble in Union Square. I sifted through the health stacks, but after browsing for about 20 minutes, nothing was jumping out at me. Feeling a little disappointed, I began making my way back down to the street level, figuring I'll spend some time in the park across the street as a Plan B, when I found myself instinctively migrating to another section of the bookstore.

The humor section.

As I browsed the humor section (and actually **laughed out loud** a couple times), I began to think about how serious issues of health and wellness have become. With the explosion of information on the "diseases of society", on how to eat healthy, foods and ingredients to avoid, the benefits and risks of exercising, it's easy to become overwhelmed with trying to be a little healthier and making sense of it all.

What happened to good old fashioned humor?

With a little research, I've learned that there is **real science behind the power of "mirthful laughter" to help regulate mood, relieve pain, and promote feelings of well-being and relaxation**. According to Gita Jill Fendelman, certified Kripalu and Internationally renowned [Laughter Yoga](#) teacher (she can "laugh in Mandarin too"), laughter also has been scientifically shown to enhance resilience and morale in the workplace, lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormones, increases muscle range of motion, boosts immune system function, and increases cancer-fighting cells (among many other benefits). Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers.

But what does humor have to do with Yoga?

Walking into a Yoga studio can be very daunting in its seriousness, but it doesn't have to be. Many teachers, myself included, err on the side of seriousness because we want to ensure safety and clear instruction. But I find that **a little humor to ease the tension (literally) goes a long way** towards finding balance, loosening up and growing more flexible, in body and in life.

## The Broader Perspective

If you find yourself in a yoga practice and feeling more than a little ridiculous about what's being asked of you, try looking on the humorous side. One of my yoga teachers likes to say if you fall out of a pose, just laugh it off and get back to it. Because it doesn't matter. You came to the mat to practice, and that's what's important.

And by the way, I left the bookstore with an anthology of *The Far Side* cartoons by Gary Larson. I think it has been my **best wellness book purchase** to date.

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Alena Gerst's unique teaching style blends her experiences as a Yoga Teacher, Licensed Counselor, and certified LifeForce Yoga® Practitioner for anxiety and depression. She provides outpatient individual and group counseling at NYU Langone Medical Center, inpatient therapeutic yoga at Beth Israel Medical Center, and teaches Hatha Yoga inspired by the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar. An accomplished professional performing artist, she also conducts speaking engagements on mind-body wellness and healing. For more information, visit [www.alenagerst.com](http://www.alenagerst.com), and [www.IWDwellness.org](http://www.IWDwellness.org)