

# Rx: Laughter

If you're not laughing, you probably should be. Up to 90 percent of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments, reports the July 15, 2006, *American Psychological Association journal*. It's time to nix tension, and the solution is right under your nose: Have a laugh.

There's truth behind the old saying "Laughter is the best medicine." Clifford C. Kuhn, M.D., Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at the University of Louisville Health Sciences Center in Kentucky, helps chronically ill patients resuscitate their humor. Alongside comedian Jerry Lewis, he's taught medical students across the country about laughter's healing powers.

"Although laughter has been proven to boost immunity, relieve pain, decrease anxiety, prevent depression and balance perspective, stress reduction is its most commonly experienced and documented benefit," says Kuhn.

According to his research, stress is triggered by our realization that we can't control everything in our lives. "Laughter works because it punctures the perfectionism and pomposity that creates most of our stress," he says.

The bottom line: crack yourself up. It's what the doctor ordered.

Here are 5 great gifts sure to amuse the people on *your* holiday list.

**1. Grumpy Santa** (below)

This motion-activated belching Mr. Claus (**\$16.89**) emits gems like "I like naughty" (putting a whole new spin on "Ho, ho, ho"); 800-901-1163 or [prankplace.com](http://prankplace.com).



**2. The Funny Thing Is...**  
by Ellen DeGeneres

The comedian's look at life's absurdities will have you laughing—

and crying tears of laughter. **\$10.01**; [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and local bookstores.

**3. Hello Kitty Purse: Mademoiselle**

No, it's not for your four-year-old. Bestow it on an over-30 gal pal and she'll feel like a kid again. **\$24.50**; [shop.sanrio.com](http://shop.sanrio.com).

**4. Women's Wit: 2007 Mini Day-to-Day Calendar**

This little calendar quotes the likes of Kyra Sedgwick: "Now that I'm older, I let myself be who I am—bitchy and greedy on some days, nice and loving on others." **\$7.51** (paperback); [walmart.com](http://walmart.com) and stationery shops.

**5. 50 Ways to Have Fun at Work**

For the friend who won't leave the office, this pack of 50 cards offers tips to stay amused, like "Kidnap a colleague's plant and hold it for ransom." **\$9.95**; [foureyesjokeshop.com](http://foureyesjokeshop.com).

—W.G.

# online calorie

If you're out shopping or on the way to the gym and only have time for a fast-food fix, visit [nutritiondata.com](http://nutritiondata.com) for a complete nutritional analysis of your favorite on-the-go foods. It'll keep you on the straight and narrow. Hankering for a Krispy Kreme? The site provides a reality check, registering that innocent little glazed pumpkin pie doughnut at 340 calories and 27 grams of fat. How about a Starbucks



## burn baby burn

Even before Jane Fonda exhorted us to "feel the burn," physiologists had fingered lactic acid as the cause of the muscle pain, soreness and fatigue that follows vigorous exercise. But this earlier this year, that thinking has been reversed for good. A new view of lactic acid was established in a paper published in January in the *American Journal of Physiology, Endocrinology and Metabolism*.

But the genesis of this "news" dates back to the 1970s, when George A. Brooks, Ph.D., a professor of integrative biology at UC Berkeley, challenged the theory of lactic acid as a lingering and cumulative by-product to avoid. By tracing radioactive lactic acid in rats, Brooks discovered that lactic acid actually gets taken up rapidly by the muscles as a fuel and quickly dissipates as it helps muscles work longer and harder. Muscle soreness is caused by other factors ranging from excess hydrogen ions to the micro-inflammation and muscle tears that result from exertion.

In correcting this misconception, Brooks and his colleagues have forced science to catch up with what many trainers have instinctively known: by increasing endurance, performance improves as muscles use more lactic acid. So if you're dragging your way through your Pilates session, work on endurance: Step up the flow in your movement, add resistance with stronger springs and consider a few more Reformer-on-the-mat routines into your regimen.

—Regina Joseph



# counter



Caramel Apple Cider? Try 228 calories and 50 grams of sugar.

Complete menu items from restaurants including Dairy Queen, Chick-fil-A, Burger King and Pizza Hut are available. Forewarned is forearmed.

Started by husband-wife team Ron and Lori Johnson, fitness and nutritional consultants,

Nutrition Data uses the National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference as its source. Nutrition Data estimates individual daily needs, analyzes recipes, tracks food consumption and provides weight-loss tips. If you are curious to see what nutrients your cranberry sauce has, or whether homemade or canned is healthier, just click a button. The colorful graphics will tell you almost instantly what foods should be at the top of your list or in the garbage. The site is easy to navigate and, best of all, free.

—Liz Lipski, Ph.D.



## get carded

Forget monogrammed cards. What better way to show your love of Pilates than with these two new striking note-card sets from Balanced Body (\$17.95 per set)? Each box includes 12 blank cards (three each of four dramatic full-color images) and envelopes. The “Joe Cards” features 12 notes with four different images of Joseph Pilates from the 1940s and '60s. Call 800-pilates or visit [www.pilates.com](http://www.pilates.com).