

SIA's Priority Magazine – Laugh Affair (Excerpt)

Prescriptions don't get much better than this: clock 10 minutes of hearty, bellyaching laughter to enjoy a pain-free slumber. For Norman Cousins, a *Saturday Review* editor diagnosed with a life-threatening collagen disease in the 1960s, pain management was a toss-up between 26 aspirins a day and a healthy dose of humour. Cousins opted to bury himself in Marx Brothers movies and *Candid Camera* reruns, chalking up enough guffaws to tell an astounding tale of recovery in the 1979 bestseller *Anatomy Of An Illness*. And when he was stricken with a heart condition in the 1980s, laughter was again the perfect foil, as well as the subject of a new book, *The Healing Heart*.

Although it's been suggested that laughter merely served to distract Cousins from his suffering, there is growing research to support his claim that laughter is good for health. For one, says Lee Berk, professor of pathology and anatomy at the Loma Linda University in California, laughing is a form of internal jogging, and just like light exercise, it gets the lungs moving and the blood circulating while reducing the level of stress in the body. To prove it, Berk sat 10 volunteers down to watch an hour-long comedy while having their blood tested; one of his findings was that laughter led to a decrease of stress chemicals in the blood, particularly that of cortisol, the primary stress hormone.