

# When laughter is the best medicine

**T**he Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, AB, stocks a library of rib-tickling videos for patients to enjoy—from *Mr. Bean* to *I Love Lucy*. In Toronto, “certified laughter leader” Catherine Lawrence, owner of a business called Survival of the Funniest, holds seminars to teach accountants, executives and other professionals to guffaw on cue. And UCLA-based Rx Laughter ([www.rxlaughter.org](http://www.rxlaughter.org)) is a research, therapeutic and educational organization that aims to show the medical benefits of comedy for seriously ill children and their families.

These organizations recognize what scientists have also begun to acknowledge—the soothing and calming effects of a good, hearty laugh. “If you can laugh at something, it empowers you,” says Donna Vine, Coordinator of Volunteer Services at the Cross Cancer Institute. “It can help ease fear, take your mind off your illness and get you through the day.”

Studies show that laughter has other benefits, including boosting immunity, easing pain and perhaps even prolonging your life. Dr. William Fry, a humour researcher and professor emeritus of Stanford University Medical School, found that 20 seconds of belly laughter is as good for the heart as three minutes of rowing. Meanwhile, a study from the University of Maryland Medical Center found that people with heart disease are 40 percent less likely to laugh in a variety of situations than people of the same age with healthy tickers.

“Laughter and humour are profound survival skills,” says Lawrence (you can check out her website at [www.survivalofthefunniest.com](http://www.survivalofthefunniest.com)). “We all have a great amount of unavoidable stress in our lives, and things we can’t control. Trying to improve our laugh life is one thing we can all work on.”



ABOVE: CERTIFIED LAUGHTER LEADER CATHERINE LAWRENCE: “LAUGHTER AND HUMOUR ARE PROFOUND SURVIVAL SKILLS.”

## Ukrainian style

In the Ukraine, pharmacists can legally dispense many drugs that are only available by prescription in Canada (for example, antibiotics and anti-inflammatories). At the Aitteka Gedeon Richter pharmacy in Kharkiv, part of the Budapest-based Gedeon Richter chain, pharmacists bill themselves as pediatric specialists, providing child-friendly formulations of medications and nutritional products that can’t be found in supermarkets.

Photo is courtesy of Daryia Strilyana, whose mother, Olena Strilyana, manages the Aitteka Gedeon Richter pharmacy.

