



# The Power of a Smile

By Carl A. Trapani, MA, MS, LPC; Chippewa Manor Campus Chaplain

**H**ave you ever just stopped and pondered the power of a smile? Most of us probably haven't. But there is something transforming about a face that portrays joy, happiness and positivity.

The Proverbs tell us that emotional joy is like a good medicine. It makes you feel good. It's good for what ails you. But how can we feel happy? How can you be happy or joyful with all the negative things going on? The answer is simple – but so profound.

If you smile more, you will feel better.

I think we all agree – more smiles would do the whole world a lot of good. Mother Teresa said, "Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love."

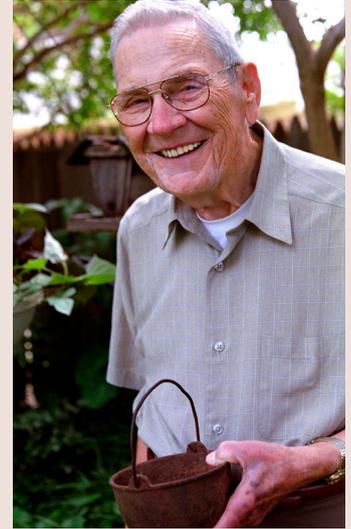
Most people think of a smile as the result of happiness, not the cause of it. In other words, we feel good, so we smile. But there's growing evidence that putting on a smile can actually help you feel happier. Smiling gives you a boost of chemicals that help produce positive emotions even when you're not initially feeling them.

A study performed by Tara Kraft and Sarah Pressman, published in *Psychological Science*, revealed that smiling reduces the body's heart rate during stressful situations. Kraft and Pressman discovered that smiling boosted levels of serotonin, even when the smile was forced. Serotonin is a natural stress reducer in the brain. This suggests that even a forced smile can help you deal with difficulties better.

Neurologist Dr. Isha Gupta points to even more evidence of the power of a smile. Gupta cites the fact that smiling creates a chemical reaction in the brain that also produces dopamine (the "feel-good" hormone). This important neuro-chemical boosts mood, motivation, and attention, and helps regulate movement, learning, and emotional responses. Low dopamine levels are often associated with depression, while higher levels of dopamine produce a feeling of happiness. So what the research suggests is, if we want to feel better, learn better and even move better... we should smile!

The lingering effects of COVID-19 have affected our attitudes and emotions in unprecedented ways. So many are worn thin mentally and physically. We are facing an onslaught of depression like never before. Seems like there is little we can do to combat the negatives all around us. But there is something all of us can do. Each of us can fight back by smiling!

Smiling by itself, may not cure the coronavirus, but it's one treatment everyone can use. So, smile at everyone – as often as you can. You will be helping and blessing them – as well as yourself. People doing good deeds send out ripples into the world. Those ripples are significant in creating positive changes!



Dr. William James, the "Father of American psychology," captures the core of this idea with this famous quote. "I don't sing because I'm happy. I'm happy because I sing."

Think about that for a moment - then smile!

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