

Smile, for Goodness Sake!

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Once upon a time an employee of a newspaper asked the editor how he manages to stay calm despite the gross printing mistakes, blistering calls from irate public officials and the regular dose of defamation cases. His answer was quite unexpected: "I just smile. Even if I am feeling really low and helpless, I just stop and smile, I automatically feel better."

The baffled employee left the boss's room wondering about her employer's mental soundness, feeling quite embarrassed at her silly question and couldn't help but smile a little. Slowly it spread over her face and she felt an uncontrollable urge to giggle, which she did for the next five minutes, much to the amusement of her co-workers who couldn't help but join in. The strangest thing was that she actually felt quite happy although for no particular reason, thus proving the boss's point.

According to research on the subject of smiling, a human face has around 44 muscles which can do 5000 expressions. Before you start trying all of them out (which may land you in a straightjacket and a permanent resident-ship in an institute) just try smiling right now. Not the stilted, fake smile you give when you meet a much detested acquaintance who has been badmouthing you behind your back. Make sure the smile is genuine – think of something funny, or someone you love, (any baby you know will suffice) or even the fact that you are smiling for nothing. You will start feeling better, lighter, happier. Apparently those feel-good endorphins are secreted when you are smiling regardless of whether it is a spontaneous grin or an induced one – as long as it's a real smile.

All sorts of remarkable benefits have been stated by researchers and smile experts – it makes you look younger and more attractive, it slows your heartrate and makes your body relax, it's good for your teeth(!), it's contagious and so spreads the feeling of wellbeing, it's a stress reliever and reduces many of the awful side effects of mental anxiety such as high blood pressure, poor digestion, palpitation. Smiling can even help relieve pain although it is a challenge when encountering things like root canals and bumble bee stings.

Some people are incorrigible smileys – they just can't stop smiling. It looks like some spring in their faces has been cut loose and there's no way to wipe out that grin off their faces. These could be individuals who are just genuinely optimistic about life, a little delusional even, as grumpy critics will say.

There are also others who just look like they are smiling even if they're not. This can be confusing as they may be furious with someone and blasting his head off but the recipient of the tirade may think he is joking and just smile back, often aggravating the situation.

There are drawbacks to smiling, as when it is done inappropriately. It is for instance quite objectionable if you smile while someone is recounting a tragic situation: "I've just been fired"; "My pet tarantula died", "My grandmother has been kidnapped". Strangely enough, many people have an irresistible urge to giggle at solemn occasions such as funeral ceremonies and board meetings which land them in all kinds of trouble.

Smiling while being mugged, held hostage or when faced with inebriated or intoxicated men, is also quite imprudent.

Women have to be extra careful when they smile at strangers – unless they want the interaction to graduate to higher levels. Smiling absent-mindedly while travelling in a vehicle can lead to very irritating situations. You may be smiling over a funny text message or incident and look up to find some creep sticking out his tongue and winking at you from the vehicle next to you. Invariably this will be in the middle of a killing gridlock which means you will have to endure another 45 minutes of this asinine behaviour. Tucking away that treacherous smile in the depths of your being and putting on a murderous scowl is the only way to minimize the damage.

Although it has been found that during interviews candidates who smiled more often landed the job as opposed to those who thought looking deadpan serious indicated efficiency, it is crucial not to overdo it. Laughing hysterically, every time the interviewer says something ironic can send alarming bells and give the impression that you are either a drug user or a recent mental asylum escapee.

Other than these few flaws, generally speaking, smiling significantly enhances wellbeing. It's also absolutely free. Now that should put a grin on your face.