

# Laughter can help relieve stress of arthritis, therapist tells audience

By Robert C. McCormick  
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David Jacobson, who works with patients—some terminal—at the University Medical Center, did his stand-up comic routine at the monthly meeting of the Green Valley Arthritis Support Group on Monday.

And he left them laughing after proving that humor can help you forget the pain for awhile and even make it possible to live a normal life in spite of disabilities that might otherwise keep you in bed or a wheelchair.

Jacobson, then 22, was a college wrestler with a Black Belt in judo when arthritis began to attack his muscles and joints.

"The doctors said I would be in a wheelchair within 10 years," he said.

But he refused to accept that prognosis and now, at 30, he is able to walk, sometimes with the help of a cane. Last fall he rode his bicycle 116 miles in the El

Tour de Tucson to raise funds for the Arthritis Foundation.

After fighting to overcome his initial depression at the loss of control over his body, he read Norman Cousins' first book about how he fought his cancer with humor and a positive attitude about overcoming his illness.

"Cousins said that 10 minutes of hard laughter was equal to two hours of pain relief," Jacobson said.

Research has proven that laughter is an effective therapy for reducing stress and stress can cause arthritis to flare up.

Laughter relaxes the muscles and also releases endorphins in the brain and they act as a natural pain



(News photo by Susan Mosey Pearce)

David Jacobson has (left to right) LaVerne Fournier, Martha Vanstrom, Doris Pierce and Ruth Newton laughing after they made a character Mr. Art Thritic out of marshmallows during a lecture at the Green Valley Arthritis Support Group.

back spasms," Jacobson added.

He then loosened up his audience with running jokes and tossing marshmallows in the air and catching them in his mouth.

He had attendees play several games designed to make them look at themselves in a different way.

"We have to learn to take ourselves lightly and sometimes play tricks on our mind, because our mind plays tricks on us," the therapist said.

When he started getting in shape for the El Tour de Tucson he told himself he was only going to ride three miles a day but always rode many more every day, he added.

"Don't let your mind set up roadblocks or limits and always try to go beyond what you thought you could do," he advised.

Jacobson told the true story about the Russian weight lifter who was going

petition.

"Before his first attempt his coach told him to start out at 499 pounds, but the coach had put 501 pounds on the bar and he managed to lift it with no unusual

strain.

"The coach knew the athlete had a mind-set telling him he couldn't lift 500 pounds and helped him bypass this mental limitation," Jacobson explained.

"Negative emotions bring negative results and positive emotions bring positive results," he emphasized.

Like most people with arthritis, he has good days and bad days and takes along a "humor bottle" with all his other medications to help make his day a little lighter.

His humor bottle is a journal of jokes he has been collecting for several years and they still cheer him up because he has forgotten the punchlines to most of the them, Jacobson added.

bad accident cases were being brought in and some of them later died.

At a staff conference with doctors and nurses at the end of the week, he was asked his reaction to his first week on the job.

"I slid off my chair onto the floor making faces and throwing my arms and legs around and broke them all up," he said.

"You can always make a serious situation lighter with a little laughter," Jacobson added.

He also gave his audience some suggestions for keeping their lives a little happier:

- Make a list of things to do that give you the most joy, things you haven't done in many months.
- List why you stopped doing these things.
- Take two things from the list that gave you the most happiness.
- Think about what you can do to bring these things