Put a smile on your face for a healthy, happier, longer life

World Smile Day is celebrated on Friday, October 1. Initiated by American artist Harvey Ball, the creator of the yellow smiley face, this day is dedicated to putting smiles on the faces of people around the world.

Benefits of smiling

Studies have shown that genuine smiling and positive mood is associated with a longer life.

The physical action of smiling can prompt a chemical reaction in your brain, prompting it to release important hormones including serotonin, endorphins and dopamine.

Your brain releases serotonin, a vital chemical in the human body, when you smile. This natural mood stabiliser is thought to help to control muscles, heal wounds and regulate sleep patterns.

The movement of your facial muscles into a smile also triggers the release of endorphins in the brain. It will release endorphins in a process known as the facial feedback hypothesis. In a study conducted by the *Journal of Nonverbal Behaviour*, this concept occurs when the positioning of one's facial muscles feeds information to the brain and chemicals are released accordingly.

Whether it's a real or forced smile, your brain doesn't differentiate between the two. If your mood is low but you smile, your body will process this sensory feedback and actually boost your mood by releasing 'happy' chemicals. Facial feedback hypothesis also works the other way around: if you have a scowl or frown on your face, your brain will interpret this as an instruction to release chemicals to make you feel angry or low.

Aside from serotonin and endorphins, which can also be natural pain relievers, smiling also triggers a release of dopamine in the body.

Often referred to as a 'feel-good' chemical, dopamine is a neurotransmitter in the brain that can produce a good mood. Achieving something satisfying produces an increase in dopamine, resulting in feelings of satisfaction, pride, pleasure and motivation.

Ideal levels of dopamine can improve your focus, alertness and productivity levels, and it is also known to produce temporary feelings of euphoria. Dopamine also plays a role in maintaining healthy blood flow and a regular heart rate, as well as proper functioning of organs such as the heart, kidneys and pancreas.

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