

The Power of the Smile



Cafes, community and culture. Living in Redcliffe we have plenty of reasons to smile but did you know that when you turn your frown upside down you are also reaping the health benefits?

In fact, we can learn from the youngest members of our community. Some research tells us that children on average smile up to 400 times a day. The average adult? 20 times. Those really happy adults that we encounter they average 40-50 smiles a day.

Guillaume Duchenne was a French neurologist who studied smiling in the 1800's. His studies found that while the muscles which control the corners of the mouth can engage in smiling can be activated whenever we want. However, for the genuine smile the orbicularis oculi is engaged- this is the area around the eyes which we can't control. Therefore, when you see someone smiling with their eyes as well it is also known as the Duchenne smile.

So why do we smile? Despite thinking happiness may be the cue researchers have argued that the act of smiling is also based on our primal instincts. We smile when embarrassed, when we make mistakes and when we are walking along the esplanade and another walker smiles at us and says hello.

In order to get that genuine Duchenne smile going there are so many ways to up your smile count.

- Exercise releases the endorphins- as Elle Woods in Legally Blonde famously said "endorphins make you happy..."
- Start your day with a smile. Get the mouth engaged in a smile- you will activate the neurons and should start to notice your smile is contagious if you are out in public. It ties into that primal part of our brain where people want to be accepted as a part of a group. If we see someone smile, studies have shown we naturally follow suit.
- Smile whenever you think about it!
- Leave yourself little messages to remind yourself to smile- I have two notes on my desk- one from my gym manager that says, "You're a good person." I have another one I wrote one day after being super cranky- it say's "Be Nice". Both make me smile and remind me not to dwell too long on things which steal my smile.

How does smiling impact your health though? The Duchenne smile causes your brain to release tiny molecules called neuropeptides. Neuropeptides reduce stress. Smiling also means we are releasing dopamine, serotonin and endorphins too. These endorphins can act as a mild pain reliever, whereas the serotonin is an antidepressant. Some studies have even suggested smiling can help us recover faster from stress and reduce our heart rate.

FUN SMILE FACTS:

The idea of World Smile Day was created by Harvey Ball, who also created the smiley face logo in 1963.

The first email smiley face was sent at 11:44 am on September 19, 1982.

Even artificially produced smiles have been shown to induce happiness.

Smiling while talking on the phone makes you sound friendly.

Unsurprisingly, locals here are never far from a smile so keep spreading the joy!

- Erin Andrews