**What soap is to the body, laughter is to good health**

*Mary-Jane Honner*

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Instead of becoming overwhelmed by something, laugh. A good giggle has a number of benefits, including reducing stress. It’s proven to be better than a bar of chocolate and a hearty belly laugh will produce a nice six pack, as a 100 smiles is equivalent to slogging away on the treadmill for 15 minutes!

RFDS decided to test the case that a laugh can create a new perspective to a problem and give a psychological distance that allows you to look at situations in a lighter and less threatening manner.

RFDS Central Operations provides primary health care to a number of rural Australians across both SA and NT.

The test, comedy HealthPlays—one about diabetes and the other depression. Both are serious health problems: diabetes is the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia and depression a silent stalker affecting so many.

The aim was to increase rural Australian’s knowledge of diabetes, depression and ways of preventing or managing these health issues.

The tour was successful in terms of the number of people attending and participation in the question-and-answer sessions post-play. Did the plays make people laugh? Yes. Can a good giggle be interpreted as an audience understanding the key health messages enough to seek a health check-up and/or make changes to their lifestyle?

The challenge was how to best evaluate the impact of the HealthPlays and ensure the results were meaningful for further service planning and ways to promote health messages in rural and remote areas where people are time poor.