

# Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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## The Value of a Smile

One of the things that makes us authentically human is a smile. A smile says so very much through that one simple act. And every single person needs this reminder every day.

A smile, as defined by Webster's Dictionary, says the act of smiling is "to make the corners of the mouth turn up in an expression that shows happiness, amusement, pleasure, affection, etc. Also, to bestow approval; and to appear pleasant or agreeable." Ah! But there is so much more to it than that.

With the giving of a smile, there is an approval that is transmitted from one person to the other. And only if for a brief moment, a slight nod of acceptance by the recipient of the initial smile, with a return smile, secures the transaction.

It is said that it takes fewer muscles to smile than to frown. Is it true? I checked it out on the Internet. Here's what I found out on, Cecil's Storehouse of Human Knowledge. Apparently, Cecil Adams contacted a doctor David H. Song, MD, FACS (Fellow of the American College of Surgeons), plastic surgeon and assistant professor at the University of Chicago Hospitals. Dr. Song, among other things, reconstructs faces.

Now, for your educational benefit, here are the findings presented by Dr. Song. The first listing is for the muscles involved in smiling. The second is for the muscles required in frowning, or what is also known as a scowl. This is fun!

Muscles involved in a "zygomatic" (i.e., genuine) smile:

*Zygomaticus major and minor.* These muscles pull up the corners of the mouth. They're bilateral (one set on either side of the face). Total number of muscles: 4.

*Orbicularis oculi.* One of these muscles encircles each eye and causes crinkling. Total: 2.

*Levator labii superioris.* Pulls up corner of lip and nose. Bilateral. Total: 2.

*Levator anguli oris.* Also helps elevate angle of mouth. Bilateral. Total: 2.

*Risorius.* Pulls corner of mouth to the side. Bilateral. Total: 2. Grand total for smiling: 12.

Principal muscles involved in a frown:

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*Orbicularis oculi* (again). Total: 2.

*Platysma*. Pulls down lips and wrinkles skin of lower face. Bilateral (though joined at midline). Total: 2.

*Corrugator supercilii* (bilateral) and *procerus* (unilateral). Furrow brow. Total: 3.

*Orbicularis oris*. Encircles mouth; purses lips. Unilateral. Total: 1.

*Mentalis*. Depresses lower lip. Unilateral. Total: 1.

*Depressor anguli oris*. Pulls corner of mouth down. Bilateral. Total: 2. Grand total for frowning: 11.

“Despite the fact that smiling uses more muscles (12, to 11 in frowning), Dr. Song believes it takes less effort than frowning — people tend to smile more frequently, so the relevant muscles are in better shape. You may feel this conclusion assumes a rosier view of the human condition than the facts warrant, but I defer to the doctor. Incidentally, a superficial, homecoming-queen smile requires little more than the two *risorius* muscles. So, if your goal in expressing emotion is really to minimize effort, go for insincere.” (Cecil Adams)

I’m betting that as you read the list of muscles required for smiling and frowning you were attempting to try those muscles to see if this was true. Be honest! You really did move your mouth around, making your lips either curve up or down, right? I know I did!

I found this whole list amusing, if for no other reason than it should cause us all to recognize the importance of smiling every day. So, regardless of how many muscles it takes to produce that much pleasantness, make the effort. Lord knows, our world needs more genuine smiles!

Here are six direct benefits to smiling: 1. Lowers blood pressure, 2. Creates a better mood (especially for bad days), 3. Relieves stress, 4. Strengthens the immune system, 5. Lessens pain, and 6. Smiling is contagious.

Finally, take note of these three verses from the book of Proverbs: 1. *A cheerful look brings joy to the heart* (Prov 15:30), 2. *A joyful heart is good medicine* (Prov 17:22), and 3. *A glad heart makes a happy face* (Prov 15:13).

Or, as the old Merry Melodies cartoon and song said, “Smile, Darn ya, Smile!”