



The Healing Power of Humor

Using Laughter to Reduce Stress

When you laugh, your body relaxes, releasing the same endorphins that give you a calming glow after exercise. When you make others laugh, you draw people together and strengthen relationships. When you find humor in a setback or an unhappy situation, you push yourself to look at life from different perspectives, which can help you break out of a low mood and find ways to get past obstacles. Humor and laughter help you let go of defensiveness and resentments and approach life, even its greatest challenges, with more openness, flexibility and courage. With so many benefits and no cost, it makes sense to draw on the power of humor and laughter as tools for managing stress.

Short-term benefits

A good laugh has great short-term effects. When you start to laugh, it doesn't just lighten your load mentally, it actually induces physical changes in your body.

- **Activate and relieve your stress response.** A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase and then decrease your heart rate and blood pressure. The result? A good, relaxed feeling.
- **Energize your body.** Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, increases the endorphins that are released by your brain and stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles.
- **Soothe tension.** Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

Long-term effects

Laughter isn't just a quick pick-me-up, though. It has been shown that humor has a myriad of wide-reaching psychological, social and physical health benefits over the long term of a person's life.

- **Improve your immune system.** Negative thoughts manifest into chemical reactions that can affect your body by bringing more stress into your system and decreasing your immunity. By contrast, positive thoughts can actually release neuropeptides that help fight stress and potentially more-serious illnesses.
- **Relieve pain.** Laughter may ease pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers.
- **Increase personal satisfaction.** Laughing can make it easier to cope with difficult situations. It also helps you connect with other people.
- **Improve your mood.** Many people experience depression. Laughter can help lessen your stress, depression and anxiety and may make you feel happier. It can also improve your self-esteem.
- **Strengthens relationships.** Laughing with your friends and family diffuses tensions and creates bonds between people.

If you are concerned about your mental health, don't hesitate to seek advice. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential assessment and counseling services. Contact your BHS Care Coordinator by calling 800-245-1150 or by visiting www.behavioralhealthsystems.com.



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