

## Put Laughter and Humor in Your Life

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Laughter and humor can counteract the sometimes debilitating effects of stress. This NebGuide discusses ways to incorporate laughter and humor into your life.

Research shows that stress can be physically dangerous. Stress can trigger higher levels of the hormone cortisol in the bloodstream. This can increase blood pressure, blood sugar and heart rate and decrease the body’s immune responses. The good news is that research suggests that laughter and humor can lower cortisol levels and stimulate the immune system, which can counteract the debilitating effects of stress.

Humor can be used to reinterpret stressful events. Everyone enjoys a good hearty laugh. It makes us feel good, and that good feeling can stay with us even after the laughter subsides. It is difficult to think clearly in the throes of a stressful situation. We may make decisions based on the emotion of the moment and regret those decisions later. If we can allow ourselves to laugh when stressed, that laughter can enable us to step back and gain perspective. Perspective gives us an opportunity to look at a stressful situation with increased objectivity and insight and not cloud our thought processes with confusion.

While stressors can create friction within the family unit and disrupt relationships, humor and laughter rebuild and unify those relationships. It binds us together and lightens our burdens. Laughter and appropriate humor can be caring and empathetic. It can invite others to share in the moment and create an environment of rapport between people in a relationship, whether in a personal or work situation.

In addition to acting as an antidote to stress, laughter and humor can emotionally bond people together and demonstrate support and acceptance. It can create new ways of thinking and adapting to stressors and can improve one’s physiological, emotional and mental well-being. A hearty laugh can massage every organ in the body, including the heart and lungs. Laughter can release endorphins, natural chemicals in the body that cause feelings of elation or happiness when they are released.

Here are some ways to enhance your sense of humor and enjoy some endorphin-releasing “belly laughs.”

- Remind yourself to have fun. When the going gets tough, just repeat to yourself, “*Life is crazy,*” or “*It’s OK to be foolish on occasion.*”
- Head off stress with regular doses of humor. Remember, “*A shot of humor is like a dose of medicine; the effects linger, dissipating gradually over several hours.*” Create your own humor library by clipping funny cartoons, pictures and greeting cards. Post them where you can see them and enjoy a chuckle.
- Rent or collect funny videos. Learn what tickles your funny bone. Some people like slapstick humor while others prefer subtle humor. It will be easy to choose movies when you know what type of humor you appreciate.
- Make a “silliness” check at 4:30 in the afternoon. People around you need to see you smile, whether at home or at work. When you’re happy and laughing, it rubs off on others. Laughter *is* contagious! A well-developed sense of humor is essential to avoid burnout for people who are teachers, doctors, educators, nurses, counselors, farmers and ranchers and many other occupations. It is also essential for parents.
- Lighten up and learn to laugh at yourself. We should take our work seriously but not take ourselves quite so seriously. View would-be calamities through the eyes of your favorite comedian. Say to yourself, “*How would Jay Leno or Larry the Cable Guy react to this?*” “*What would they do in my shoes?*”

Remember, life is full of stressful situations. The choice to see humor in everyday situations is healthful and helpful. Learn to appreciate the power of laughter. It will lighten your attitude and your day.

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