

## **Managing Stress through Laughter**

Laughter is a great way to relieve stress. Whether it is watching a funny television show or reading comics, or listening to a joke, a good laugh can do you good.

A good sense of humor can't cure all pain and illnesses, but there are many positive things that can happen.

Laughter has short term benefits. When you start to laugh, it just doesn't lighten your load mentally, it also induces physical changes in your body.

It stimulates your organs. Laughter can help your body take in oxygen and increase endorphins that are released by your brain.

It can activate and relieve your stress response. A laugh can fire you up, then cool you down your stress response. It can increase and then decrease your heart rate and blood pressure. It can provide a good relaxing feeling.

Laughter can soothe tension. Laughter can stimulate circulation and muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

Long term effects of laughter may include improving your immune system. Negative thoughts can affect your body by bringing more stress to your system and decreasing your immunity. By contrast, positive thoughts can release neuropeptides that help you to fight stress and potentially more serious illnesses.

Laughter can relieve pain. It can cause the body to produce its own natural painkillers.

It can increase personal satisfaction. It can help you cope more easily with difficult situations. It also helps you to connect with other people.

It can improve your mood. Many people experience depression. Sometimes it is due to chronic illnesses. Laughter can help lessen your stress, depression and anxiety and may make you feel happier. It can also improve your self-esteem.

If you have trouble finding humor. It can be learned. Find simple ways to find humor, through photos, greeting cards, comic strips. Hang them in your home or office. Watch funny shows. Listen to humorous podcasts.

Find ways to laugh about your own situations. You may find your stress begin to fade. Even if it feels forced, practice laughing, it is good for you.

Share a laugh. Make it a habit to spend time with friends who make you laugh. And then return the favor by sharing funny stories or jokes with those around you.

Know what isn't funny. Don't laugh at the expense of others. Some forms of humor are not appropriate. Use your best judgment to discern a good joke from a bad or hurtful one.

Source: Mayo Clinic, West Virginia Extension Service.