

Laugh Till It Doesn't Hurt!

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We all know how good a deep rolling belly laugh feels. How much fun it is to play and joke with friends. A good comedy show can be a tonic after a hard day at the office. It's been said that laughter is good for the soul. There's now proof that it is good for the body, mind and emotions too.

A Natural Stress Reliever

Laughter research has shown that humor can help people keep their bodies strong and disease resistant. Humor is equally helpful to our mental health and the way we deal with stress and worry. A good laugh exercises many muscles of the body and causes the brain to secrete endorphins. These "feel-good" brain chemicals raise both our mood and our coping abilities. Things don't look so bad when viewed through the eyes of humor.

Humor therapist, Patty Wooten explains, "Humor can be an empowerment tool. Humor gives us a different perspective on our problems and, with an attitude of detachment, we feel a sense of self-protection and control in our environment."(1) Humor helps us cope with stressful situations in a more relaxed, detached way. We feel more in control.



The Great Enabler

Humor helps us feel in control at work and in social situations. Therapist Cathy Fenwick encourages people to use humor in the workplace. Humor boosts morale, eases communication gaps, and helps squelch burnout. It helps us be more flexible, adaptable and open to change. A good laugh relieves boredom and boosts creativity. Spontaneity and confidence are more freely expressed. She writes, "Laughing with people is compassionate, but laughing at them is rude, immoral and unethical. Healthy humour is based on caring and empathy, builds confidence, brings people closer together and is mutually supportive."(2) Psychologists such as Carl Rogers (3) and Abraham Maslow(4) wrote that a sense of humor is a key ingredient in self-actualized, full functioning people. Being able to laugh helps us gain a freer perspective of things and face our problems with renewed energy.

A sense of humor helps us cope with our world in a more philosophical way. Being able to laugh in the face of challenge and strife is a priceless skill to develop. Nurture your ability to share humor, to laugh from your belly, to face the world with a smile. It can set the stage for productivity, satisfaction, a sense of belonging and relief from cares and burdens. Make it a daily exercise. You'll be glad you did!

References

1. Wooten, P. (1996). *Humor: An antidote for stress*. Holistic Nursing Practice. Vol. 10, No. 2, pages 49-55. Online version available at: <http://www.jesthealth.com/artantistress.html>
2. Fenwick, C. *Healing with Humor: Making Laughter Work for You*. University of Saskatchewan.
3. Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
4. Maslow, A. (1961). *Toward a psychology of being*. Princeton: Van Nostrand.

