



# Humor For The Health Of It

BY DAVID L. MEINZ, MS, RDN, FAND, CSP

Laughter is good medicine for the body and soul. A good giggle is like jogging for your insides. Consider some of these benefits:

- 1. Laughter helps relieve stress and muscle tension.** If you have the ability to laugh at yourself, it helps you put events in your life into their proper perspective. Remember, stress isn't about the events that happen to you, it's about your perception of, and your reaction to, what happens to you. A particular event might be incredibly stressful to one person, and part of everyday routine to another. Same event, different perceptions and reactions. Humor helps take some of the pressure off and helps you see the big picture.
- 2. You learn more.** People that are laughing engage both sides of the brain. This enhances learning and helps to retain more information. When my audiences are laughing they're paying attention. When

- they pay attention, they learn more. I think that when you're asking people to make changes in their lives, like in wellness, it's essential that you take some of the pressure off by helping them laugh. A spoonful of sugar does, indeed, help the medicine go down.
- 3. Laughter helps lower your blood pressure.** Those people that laugh on a regular basis tend to have a lower resting blood pressure.
  - 4. It helps you stay well.** Laughter boosts your immune system and increases the production of antibodies that helps you fight infection. People who develop their sense of humor should get less colds.
  - 5. It connects you with other people.** Think about it, even in a diverse group of strangers, when you're laughing with others you share a sense

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## Humor For The Health Of It *Continued*

of unity with them. Positive humor among co-workers contributes to workforce cohesiveness.

**6. It helps in pain reduction.** Norman Cousins was one of the first to identify the pain-reducing power of laughter. Living with a painful disease, he found that 10 minutes of belly laughter gave him two hours of pain-free sleep. Many studies have now confirmed that laughter helps patients by possibly increasing levels of endorphin production or simply by distracting attention away from the discomfort.

**7. It helps protect your heart.** A study done at the University of Maryland medical center found that people with heart disease were 40% less likely to laugh in various situations compared to those without the disease at the same age. Maybe that's because they were concerned about having heart disease! (See what I did there? Humor is looking at things just a little differently than most. Be on the lookout for the obvious contradiction or irony in a situation. That's how most professional comedians make their living. They simply point out a different viewpoint to everyday things of life. Haven't you ever asked yourself 'Why didn't I think of that?' So look for those opportunities. That's a big part of what people call having a sense of humor.)

Convinced you need to smile more? Good. Here are some ideas to get more laughter in your life. First of all, lighten up a little. Yes, there are very serious issues in life. Deal with them, but don't let them influence the quality of your daily journey. Yes, bad things happen to good people. Yes, life isn't fair. But also count your blessings. If you're reading this article, you probably live in a society that most of the rest of the world can only dream about. A bad day for you is far better than the best day for most everyone else in the world. Think about it. It's true.

You also need to expose yourself to humor. There are funny people out there. Spend time with them, take them to lunch, invite them over to your house. Humor is contagious; you might catch some of it if you expose yourself to a 'carrier.' Go to a comedy club. Stop watching all those murder and crime shows on television. What are you thinking? No

wonder you feel depressed. Do you actually pay good money to watch horror movies? No wonder you feel anxious. Stop it. And when you're in the car do you really need to listen to all the angry talk-show hosts on the radio? What does that really accomplish besides making you more frustrated and angry yourself. Why not listen to some comedy from your own favorite comedian? I think Jim Gaffigan is hilarious. You'll arrive feeling much better and more energetic. And I purposely watch comedies on television, too. I record them so I have a constant supply whenever I'm ready to watch. I find old shows like "The King of Queens" and "Frazier" lift my mood and make me actually laugh out loud. You need more laughter in your life, not more stress.

When my audiences hear that a health speaker is coming they expect the worst. They're pleasantly surprised to find that health and wellness can be promoted in a practical way that's actually fun. People like to laugh, especially when they're learning at the same time.

Now go do something funny.



*For over twenty-five years, health promotion expert David Mainz, MS, RDN, FAND, CSP has been helping audiences enhance both their personal and professional productivity. As an award-winning international speaker, author, and frequent radio and television guest, he presents his inspirational and content-rich keynotes to groups worldwide. He can be reached at [www.TheHeartOfDentistry.us](http://www.TheHeartOfDentistry.us)*