

Health Matters

Health and Wellness – Coping with life through humor

Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it.” - Bill Cosby

When was the last time you had a good laugh? You know, a truly belly holding, crying, possibly rolling on the floor kind of laugh? If you can't remember, consider this. Kids laugh on average 300 times per day, whereas adults laugh less than 20 times per day. What happens to the joy, playfulness, and silliness that we used to experience as kids? While there are certainly times to be serious, it's important to be able to laugh at ourselves and situations to lessen what might be stressful times (and because life is funny!). **Laughing at ourselves is also a way gain perspective. What might be a stressful situation can be transformed into a more manageable, and perhaps even positive, with a little humor.**

While we can absolutely laugh by ourselves, we are much more likely to laugh with others. **Laughter is a non-verbal way to connect with others while improving our mood.** Do you ever notice how the air just feels lighter when laughter fills the room? Laughing puts us at ease, and also increases bonds between people because we are having a fun, shared experience. Laughter is contagious and has no known side effects, unless you count laughing until you cry! It's that hearty belly laugh that exercises the diaphragm by causing abs to contract and muscles to relax. A good chuckle reduces stress while also giving the heart a good workout.

In addition to social benefits, laughter also provides many physical benefits. Laughter helps to boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, and reduce stress hormones because it triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. Some people call laughing "internal jogging," because a belly laugh gets your circulation flowing and can produce a cardio-like workout. Laughter is relaxing because it causes your heart rate to slow down and your blood pressure to decrease. It's also a positive outlet for anger and anxiety, and provides a healthy escape from reality. Perhaps in the future, we'll see doctors writing prescriptions for laughter!

Ways to bring more laughter into your life:

- Surround yourself with people who make you laugh.
- Read a funny book or magazine.
- Watch movies, TV shows, or videos online that you find humorous.
- Play a funny board game with friends.

(Courtesy of Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Suicide Prevention Program).

For more information, contact www.needhamma.gov/health/ncsp.