

Nutrition & Wellness for Life © 2012
Chapter 18: How Humor Affects Stress—Science Activity

Once a mother was reprimanding her seven-year-old. She was shaking her finger vigorously, with her words coming forth in a rapid fire of squeaks and whispers. The mother had laryngitis. Suddenly the humor of the scene turned the tense moment to laughter, and whatever the child's infraction had been was forgotten. Without a doubt, humor can turn stressful moments completely around.

Researchers have studied the effects of humor on the body, with some interesting results. Laughter has been found to stimulate the immune system. A good laugh can relax tense muscles. Oxygen speeds into the body's systems and lowers blood pressure. Laughter releases endorphins (substances in the brain), which help relieve pain and provide a sense of well-being. Science has shown that humor can make you feel better and give you a better perspective on problems.

When you make light of a situation, you find it less threatening. Of course, turning every serious situation into a joke isn't a good idea. Laughter at the expense of others, for example, is not helpful. You need to recognize when humor can be appropriate and useful. Then you'll have a great tool to help you manage stress in your life.

Explore the relationship between humor and stress by answering the questions below.

Activity Questions:

1. Actor Peter Ustinov once said: "Comedy is simply a funny way of being serious." Explain how this statement shows the link between humor and stress relief.

2. Have you ever been with someone who started to laugh, which caused you to laugh, too, perhaps even leading to uncontrollable laughter? Explain what happened and describe how you felt afterwards.

Name _____ Date _____

3. Suppose a family member accidentally splatters a little spaghetti sauce on your shirt at the dinner table, which makes you feel upset. How could you handle the situation with humor?

4. In question 3, what might have happened if you had chosen an angry reaction?

5. How can the ability to laugh at yourself be useful? Give an example of when you have done this effectively.