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Put Laughter and Humor in Your Life

By Herbert G. Lingren, Extension Family Scientist

Laughter is very powerful medicine. It can lower stress, dissolve anger and unite families in their resolve to overcome troubled times. This NebFact contains two articles: (1) [Helping the Humor Impaired](#) and (2) [The Benefits of Laughter](#). Read them, and put more humor and laughter in your life.

Helping the Humor-Impaired

Are you "humor-impaired"? Do you walk around with a scowl on your face? Do you often growl at and belittle others? When we are caught up in the vortex of life's challenges and hardships, it's not always easy to stop and lighten up once in a while. Here are some tips to help you put more humor in your life.

1. **Remind yourself to have fun.** When the going gets tough, just repeat to yourself, "*Life is crazy,*" and "*It's OK to be foolish on occasion.*"
2. **Head off stress with regular doses of humor.** Remember "*A shot of humor is like a dose of medicine; the effects linger, dissipating gradually, over several hours.*" See a funny movie or humorous play. You'll find yourself thinking about it after you get home, and often into the next day. Later you'll need another dose. Gauge the "humor half-life" of whatever amuses you and replenish your dosage as needed.
3. **Take a "laugh break" instead of a coffee break.** Keep a "humor first-aid kit." Fill it with comedy tapes, a book of jokes and stories, a disguise and other comic props to draw on when you feel the urge to be silly.
4. **Make a "silliness" check at 4:30 in the afternoon.** People around you need to see you smile, whether at home or at a meeting. A well-developed sense of humor is especially essential to avoid burnout for people in certain professions: teachers, doctors, educators, nurses, counselors, farmers, ranchers, etc.
5. **Lighten up.** View would-be calamities through the eyes of your favorite comedian. "Say to yourself, "*How would Seinfeld or Kelsey Grammer react to this?*" "*What would they do in my*

shoes?"

6. **Spend time with those who help you see the bright side.** Get together regularly with friends to share funny stories about daily disasters, with an eye toward constructive solutions.
7. **Learn to laugh if you can't.** If you'd like to be able to laugh but can't, if you're feeling angry, afraid or grief because of divorce, illness or other major stress, force yourself to laugh anyway. Think about what's bothering you and try a "tee-hee." If that doesn't make you feel better, try a throatier "heh-heh," then a "ha-ha" from the chest, or a "ho-ho" from the belly. If your laughter ignition seems hard to start, think of something absurd – like George Washington in a pink tutu – to help trigger your mirth.

The Benefits of Laughter

Everyone enjoys a good hearty laugh. It makes us feel good, and that good feeling can stay with us even after the laughter subsides. Laughter helps us see that small things are not the earth-shaking events they sometimes seem to be. It enables us to look at a problem from a different point of view, make it seem less serious, and realize opportunities for increased objectivity and insight.

Humor is an effective way to relieve stress. Laughter leads to a cathartic release of emotion, can help to release pent-up feelings of anger and frustration in a socially acceptable way, and is often followed by a state of relaxation and a feeling of reduced tension. Aside from the psychological benefits, laughter affects the body in a number of positive ways as well. Laughter releases endorphins – natural chemicals in the body that create a feeling of pleasure and have a pain-relieving effect.

Laughter is the shortest distance between two people. It binds us together, lightens our burdens and helps us keep things in perspective. Our work, marriage and family all need humor, celebrations, play and ritual as much as record-keeping and problem-solving. We should ask the questions "Do we laugh together?" as well as "Can we get through this hardship together?" Laughter can help us see the *silver lining* instead of just storm clouds.

Humor unites us, especially when we laugh together. One of the things that divides humans is the energy we put into coping with life's problems or concentrating each other's limitations. Our friends and neighbors are not perfect, and neither is our marriage or family life. When we laugh together, it can bind us closer together instead of putting us in opposite camps.

Laughter heals. Laughter activates the chemistry of the will to live and increases our capacity to fight disease. The chest expands when laughing, respiration increases and forces exhausted air from the lungs. Laughing relaxes the body and problems associated with high blood pressure, strokes, arthritis, ulcers and heart disease are sometimes, reduced.

Here's how can you add laughter and humor to your everyday life:

- Hang around funny friends, or better yet, marry a funny partner.
- Start looking for the absurd, silly, incongruous activities that go on around you each day.
- Take a 5-10 minute humor break each day. Read jokes, add to a humor notebook, listen to a funny tape.
- Rent comedy videos, go to a funny movie, watch humorous programs on television.
- If you hear a joke you really like, write it down, or tell it to someone else to help you remember it.

Try to remember that even in the most difficult of times, a laugh, or even simply a smile, can go a long way in helping you feel better. Laughs and smiles are enjoyed best when shared with others. To laugh or not to laugh is your choice.

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