

Looking on the Bright Side

A hopeful outlook is good for your soul — and for your body. The connection between optimism and physical health is widely accepted. Optimists appear less likely to die prematurely of heart disease than pessimists, and a generally positive attitude may boost immunity, helping fight serious diseases.

Not an optimist? Don't worry. Experts say optimists are made, not born. **The secret:** Even when you can't change circumstances, you can change how you feel about them.



CREATE a positive environment. You may think you don't have much effect on the atmosphere in your workplace, but each employee contributes to the whole. What can you do? Simply smile more. It's true, your attitude may follow the upward curve of your mouth, and good spirits tend to rub off on others.

TURN negative situations around. Rather than dwelling on what went wrong, see mistakes and challenges as opportunities for growth.

SPEND more time with upbeat people. **Why:** Psychologists say moods are as infectious as the common cold ... here's a "bug" you want to catch.

If all else fails: Force a smile. Even pretending to feel cheerful helps bring on the real thing.

When You're Too Sad to Smile

Sometimes the funniest people in the world can't make a person smile, and there is no bright side to life. This is the face of depression. It takes all the enjoyment out of life — more than just the occasional case of the blues. When that down feeling lasts longer than a few weeks, or you're having trouble functioning daily, it's time to talk to your health care provider. Depression is a medical problem that can and must be treated.

Laughter: Healthful, Not Hurtful

You might think there's no place for fun in a professional workplace. But sharing a tasteful laugh or a silly moment with co-workers can break tension and renew team spirit. But be sure you don't laugh at someone's expense. You want your humor to win smiles, not frowns.

Healthful humor spreads laughter and glee and creates closeness among people. It can involve poking fun at oneself and situations. Harmful humor, however, pokes fun at other people or groups. **Avoid:** sarcasm, put-downs, and "anti" jokes, which target groups with obvious characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity or beliefs.

Keep fun objects around your desk

and use them during the workday to reduce tension for yourself and others. **Ideas:** wind-up chattering teeth, stress management squeeze toys, a foam clown nose, a favorite funny picture or cartoon, or wear a pair of silly-looking socks.



Whether you joke, clown around or sit back and enjoy the antics of others, **invite humor into your life every day.** One expert recommends people laugh at least 15 times a day. Humor helps relieve negative feelings, fear and pain, and it can even provide an exercise workout of sorts.

Final thought: While humor may not cure an illness on its own, medical professionals believe in its therapeutic benefits. So don't hold back — surround yourself with lighthearted, positive people often, and explore activities and entertainment that make you laugh out loud and feel joy. Your body will thank you for it.

LAUGH LONG, LIVE LONGER

HOW HUMOR MAY HELP
YOUR HEALTH



LAUGHTER: SERIOUSLY GOOD MEDICINE

Have you had a good laugh lately? If you have, you know how good it can feel physically and mentally. Everyone can laugh — the very young, the elderly, people who are sick — even people burdened by serious stress or sadness can muster a chuckle.

For many years, researchers have studied laughter's potential health effects on the body. The idea that humor or laughter can be therapeutic goes back to ancient times. Today, laughter is being used in the medical community as a coping mechanism for stress, as a therapy in pain relief and for recovery from illness, and even to help boost immunity.

Are people who laugh really less likely to get sick or feel less stress? Or is it attitude or personality that helps some people cope better or recover faster from illness? More research is needed to learn the answers. But even without pure science, who would deny that laughing together with friends and family makes us feel better on several levels?



7 WAYS TO SHAPE UP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR

It's not unusual to find "humor therapy" in some of the nation's most prestigious hospitals. Many companies are even hiring humor consultants to train employees on how to lighten up. For some people, though, a sense of humor may not come easily because of stress, fatigue or other personal issues.

Practical ways to lighten up:

1. **Find** humor in the silly and absurd goings-on in daily life.
2. **Look** at the world through the eyes of children. The simplest things make them laugh.
3. **Flip** through your high-school yearbook and think of how far you have come.
4. **Enjoy** the comedies ... joke books, sitcoms, funny movies or cartoons.
5. **Surround** yourself with cheerful and funny people who like to laugh and who make you laugh. Laughter can be contagious.
6. **Play** simple board games with friends. Forget competition; relax and be silly together.
7. **Remind** yourself that having fun is a healthy activity that everyone deserves. Get reacquainted with the child in you.



MORE GOOD REASONS TO LAUGH

- It increases **alertness**.
- It stimulates the cardiovascular system by increasing **oxygen flow**.
- It empties your **lungs** of stale air.
- It exercises the **muscles** in your chest, neck and face.

- It relieves **physical tension**.
- It produces an **emotional high** and swings a negative perspective toward the positive.
- It reduces **anxiety** and reverses unhealthy, pent-up anger and frustration.
- It may boost your **immune system**.

Go Ahead and Laugh ... It's True!

Laughter helps you **physically**.

It exercises your brain, cardiovascular system and stomach muscles.

Laughter helps you **mentally**.

It eases psychological stress, relieves fear and improves your mood.

Laughter helps you **socially**.

It unites people and taps into a healthy sense of togetherness and friendship.

Laughter Rx

In healing, health care providers may use humor therapy in combination with conventional medical treatment, especially with regard to serious illnesses such as cancer. Health care providers are just beginning to learn how to tap humor and other mind/body treatments within the field of complementary and alternative medicine.



Easing the Pain

Laughter can be a healthy distraction, taking your mind off your worries. It has also been linked to disease prevention, pain relief and certainly stress relief. Scientists have found that laughter releases endorphins in the brain that may help control pain. Research shows that stress-related hormones decrease during episodes of laughter, protecting the blood vessels. These studies support the idea that **laughter plays a key role in wellness**.

Exercise Your Funny Bone

Laughter is great exercise. A good, long laugh deepens your breathing, gives your abdominal muscles a workout, massages your internal organs and gets your heart pumping — just like a workout. But laughter can't replace exercise, so don't put away your walking shoes.