

Stress relief from laughter? It's no joke

When it comes to relieving stress, more giggles and chuckles are just what the doctor ordered. Here's why.

Whether you're laughing at a sitcom on TV or quietly giggling at a newspaper cartoon, laughing does you good. Laughter is a great form of stress relief, and that's no joke.



A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but data is mounting about the positive things laughter can do.

A good laugh has great short-term effects. When you start to laugh, it doesn't just lighten your load mentally, it actually induces physical changes in your body. Laughter can:

Stimulate many organs. Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain.

Activate and relieve your stress response. A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase and then decrease your heart rate and blood pressure.

Soothe tension. Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

Laughter isn't just a quick pick-me-up, though. It's also good for you over the long term. Laughter may: Improve your immune system and relieve pain.

Developing or refining your sense of humor may be easier than you think. Put humor on your horizon. Find a few simple items, such as photos, greeting cards or comic strips, that make you chuckle.

Share a laugh. Make it a habit to spend time with friends who make you laugh.

Know what isn't funny. Don't laugh at the expense of others. Use your best judgment to discern a good joke from a bad or hurtful one.

Laughter is the best medicine...Go ahead and give it a try. Turn the corners of your mouth up into a smile and then give a laugh, even if it feels a little forced. Once you've had your chuckle, take stock of how you're feeling. Are your muscles a little less tense? Do you feel more relaxed or buoyant? That's the natural wonder of laughing at work.