

## Health Tip: Laughter

Laughter is the physiological response to humor. For centuries, laughter has brightened our lives, but research suggests that laughter may also be good medicine. According to a study by cardiologists at the University of Maryland, laughter, along with an active sense of humor, may help protect you against a heart attack. The study found that people with heart disease were 40 percent less likely to laugh in a variety of everyday situations compared to people of the same age without heart disease.

Other studies propose that laughing has a positive affect on our muscles, our pulse, blood pressure and our breathing. The physiological impact may lead to: muscle relaxation, reduction of stress hormones, strengthening the immune system, lowering pain, and exercising our heart, stomach muscles, and lungs.

Laughter can also help us to connect to others. Comedian Victor Borge described laughter as “the shortest distance between two people.” A positive attitude, reduced stress and strong connections to others can increase your resiliency and ability to cope.

In addition to getting regular exercise, eating foods low in saturated fat, and not smoking, include hearty laughter as part of a healthy lifestyle. Here are some tips:

- Decorate your office space with things that make you laugh. Place your favorite cartoon calendar or funny family photo visibly on your desk. Laughter at work can increase creative energy.
- Share a funny story or embarrassing moment with co-workers or friends. Laughter and humor promote positive relationships. When you hear something funny, your impulse is probably to tell someone and share the laughter. When laughter is shared a natural bonding takes place.
- Use humor to get your point across. Communication improves when humor is used appropriately. Workplace humor also helps to facilitate change. People who laugh often tend to be more flexible and adaptable.
- Be aware of cultural differences and avoid hostile practical jokes. They do not have the same effect and can increase stress.
- Don't take yourself too seriously. When we laugh at ourselves we are less rigid and more spontaneous. Humor also makes us less fearful of making mistakes and more confident about overcoming setbacks.
- Call a friend and recount a funny situation. You are likely to get a vigorous laugh experiencing the memory.
- Visit the greeting card aisle on your next trip to the grocery store. If a funny card makes you laugh, consider sending it to a friend.
- Don't leave laughing to accident. Make time for fun and include your family. Take the lead of your children in making a snowman or playing silly, made-up games. Schedule time to watch your favorite comedy or the classics, such as *I Love Lucy*.

By putting more laughter into your day you can improve the quality of your life and it may help to protect against stress and disease. When you are ready, take the risk to laugh out loud where others can laugh along with you.

Sources: LifeWork Strategies ([www.youradvocate.com](http://www.youradvocate.com)), University of Maryland Medical Center, The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, Paul E. McGhee, Ph.D. ([www.laughterremedy.com](http://www.laughterremedy.com)), and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.