



Harness Humor

Humor has been scientifically proven to be a tool that lifts ailing spirits. The curative power of laughter and its ability to relieve debilitating stress and burnout may indeed be one of the great medical discoveries of our times.

Larry Wilde created National Humor Month in 1976 to encourage others to embrace humor and laughter. Laughter reduces stress and pain levels, strengthens immune systems, relaxes muscles as well as increases blood flow. Humor plays an important role in our overall health and is a useful tool that heals us emotionally and physically. It also allows you to connect with others and diffuse tension.



Did You Know?

The study of laughter is called gelotology.

Health psychologist Grace Tworek, PsyD, says that many of us are living our lives on the edge, and not in a fun way.

“There’s a lot of literature that shows that Americans these days are more or less living in a ‘fight or flight’ response,” Dr. Tworek says. “Evolutionarily, that’s not what we’re made to do. Fight or flight is our natural stress response that allows us to run away from a saber-toothed tiger. It’s supposed to be short-lived. But the stress that many of us are living with day to day is triggering that response continually.”

That fight-or-flight mentality is the work of your sympathetic nervous system. Its job is to swoop in in a dangerous situation and psych you up to keep you safe. Your breathing gets shallow, your heart pounds and your pupils dilate. Researchers say that long-term activation of your stress system has serious

health implications, like an increased risk for heart disease, cancer, and a variety of other illnesses.

On the opposite side of the equation is your parasympathetic nervous system. It's also called the "rest and digest" response. When you're living on parasympathetic nervous system, your body calms down, heart rate lowers and you breathe more easily.

Your parasympathetic nervous system kicks into gear when your body knows you're not in danger and that it can safely lower its guard. Things like deep breathing, mild exercise, and laughter, can cue your nerves to calm themselves and give your fight-or-flight response a much-needed break.

Whether you're into the corny "dad jokes" (Did you hear about the restaurant on the moon? Great food, no atmosphere.) or you're a little more high-brow in your comedy, letting out a few chuckles and giggles can do your mind and body a lot of good.

References

[Cleveland Clinic: Is Laughing Good for You?](#)