

# **HOW AND WHEN CAN HUMOR BE THERAPEUTIC?**

**CREATING HEATHY WORK ENVIRONMENTS, 2019**

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# **Learning Objectives**

**At the completion of this educational presentation, those in attendance will be able to:**

- 1) Describe Laughter in terms of it's physiological benefits**
- 2) Discuss research results that relate to these benefits**
- 3) Discuss ways of implementing therapeutic laughter or humor into nursing practice**

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**What Does HUMOR Mean to YOU?**

**LAUGH  
KILLS  
LONESOME**

BESTMADECO.COM



**A GOOD LAUGH...**

**Relaxes tense muscles**

**Speeds oxygenation through circulation**

**Lowers blood pressure**

**Even FORCED laughter, provides benefit;**

**Let's try it!**

# TRY TO REMEMBER

Ho, Ho, Ha, Ha, Ha

Belly laughs can go so far as to hurt (post-op)

- relieves muscular tension
- improves breathing (unless you laugh to tears)
- regulates heart rate

Try to remember a funny memory

Creative visualization

Bring back that memory

**Never Odd or Even  
Spelled backwards is...**

# MUSCLE RELAXANT

Belly laughs result in muscle relaxation

Muscles not used in laughter relax

After a laugh, those muscles used, relax

A belly laugh is like an internal jogging

(it's a good cardiac work-out, even for those unable to exercise)

Who doesn't laugh?

Oh wait, there are those born without smiling muscles.

# **SMILE AND LAUGHTER**

**Laughter is contagious**

**A smile goes a long way...how far?**

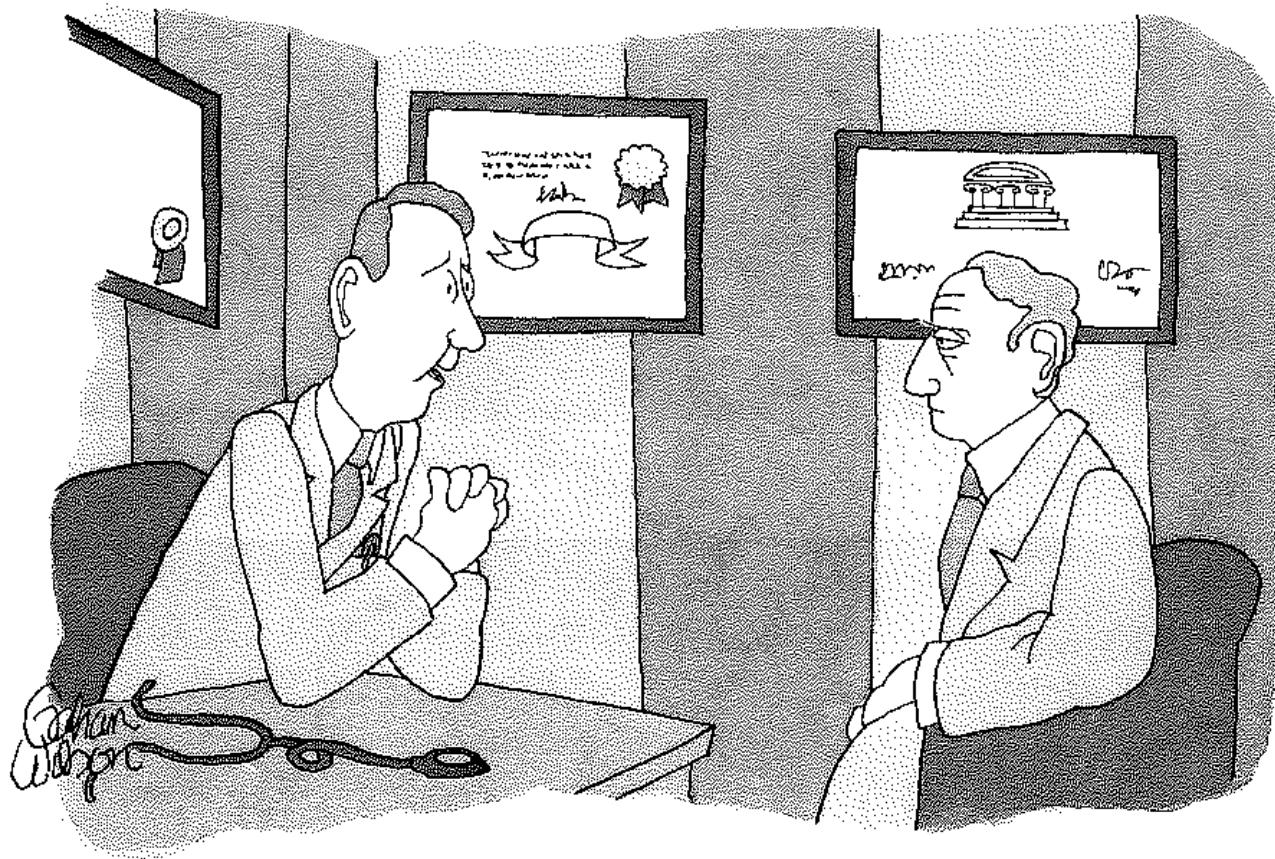
**A smile and a laugh bring positive emotions**

**Laughter is a tool, an adjunct, a compliment**

**An Alternative???**

**Laughter is FREE and has no known side effects(?)**

**Empathy – Rapport – Honesty - Trust**



*"How are the smiling exercises coming along?"*

©Gahan Wilson/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

# THE SMILE

**Smiling can make you feel better**

**Standard smiles** use muscles surrounding the mouth

**Genuine smiles** use muscles surrounding both the mouth and the eyes

**Results:** genuine smiles are related to decreased stress  
and enhanced cardiovascular status

Association for Psychological Science, 2012

Laughter decreases stress hormones, reduces artery inflammation and increases HDL cholesterol...People with heart disease are 40% less likely to laugh than those people without heart disease

American Heart Association, 2015

## Humor effects last up to **24 hours**

# **THIS MAY SOUND SILLY**

**Laughter therapy does not require specialized facilities or equipment,  
but it does require skill**

**Laughter is a physical reaction seen in humans and some other  
species of primates**

**Dogs and cats may relate to our laughter, but they don't respond with  
a smile of their own making**

**Laughter causes rhythmic, often audible, contractions of the  
diaphragm and other parts of the respiratory system**

**Being tickled – humorous story – humorous thoughts -  
Embarrassment**

# **DEFINITIONS**

**Gelotology; the study of laughter**

**Laughter is gelos in Greek, root word hele which means health**

**Laughing is like physical activity**

**Kant said “laughter has a great influence on keeping balance in physical health”**

**Laughter is the expression of one’s joyful heart or feeling when their desire is satisfied**

**Freud said “laughter is a mechanism that can block the attacks of another. It reduces negative emotional responses or unpleasant feelings”**

# **NORMAN COUSINS**

**He was the Editor-in-chief of the ‘Saturday Review’ of America**

**He suffered from ankylosing spondylitis**

**Watching comedy as a diversion, he realized he felt no pain for hours**

**He began to study the medical effects of laughter  
(California University Hospital)**

**‘Anatomy of an Illness’**

**“laughter is like a bulletproof vest”**

**Often referred to as the Father of Laughter Therapy**

# **RESEARCH WOULD SUGGEST THAT LAUGHTER**

**Controlled studies showing that laughter lowers serum cortisol levels**

**Increases the amount of activated T-lymphocytes**

**Increases the number and activity of natural killer cells**

**Increases the number of T-cells that have helper / suppresser receptors**

**Increases Gamma-interferon and B-cells**

# LAUGHTER

Triggers the release of endorphins

Lowers blood pressure

Increases muscle flexion

Produces a general sense of well-being

Thus: Laughter stimulates the immune system

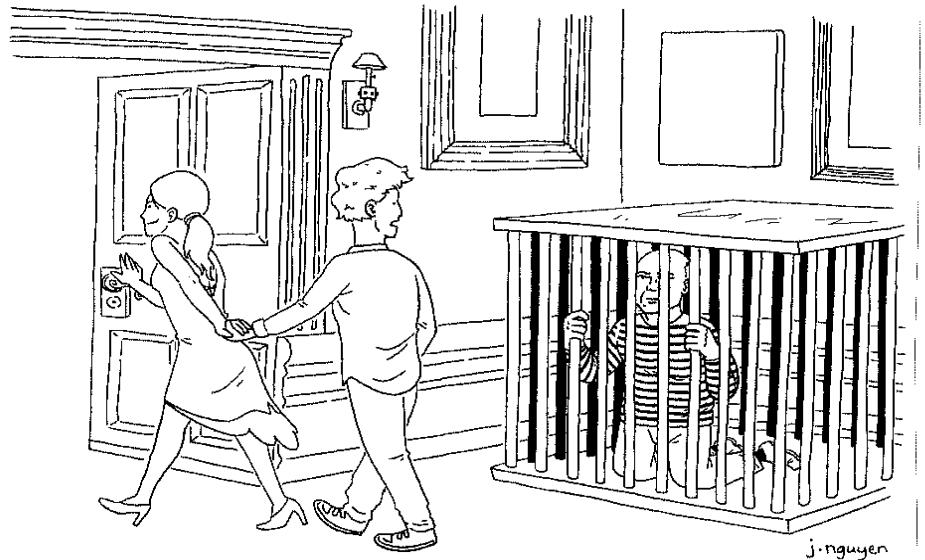
Offsetting the immunosuppressive effects of stress

# STRESS

During stress, the adrenal gland releases corticosteroids that quickly convert to cortisol

**Increased levels of cortisol have an immunosuppressive effect**

Berk's research would therefore suggest that laughter can lower cortisol levels and thereby **protect our immune system.**



*"You have a Picasso?"*

# MORE ON IMMUNE RESEARCH

natural killer cells attack viral infected cells and some types of cancers

Laughter appears to tell T-cells to “turn on”

IgA (immunoglobulin A) fights upper respiratory tract insults and infection

IgB and Compliment 3 which help antibodies to pierce dysfunctional or infected cells

(effects shown to last 24 hours after watching a humor video)

# **DECREASE IN STRESS HORMONES**

**Less blood vessel constriction**

**Less suppression of immune activity**

**Levels of epinephrine were lower in the group exposed to humor**

**(both in anticipation of and after exposure to humor videos)**

**Dopamine levels were also lower; “fight or flight response”**

# DIABETES

Diabetics got identical meals

Control group did not watch comedy show

Research group had lower glucose levels

Hypothesis: increased glucose use in muscles involved when laughing

Laughter in diabetics may improve mood; negative emotions are associated with a negative impact on blood glucose levels

Hayashi et al., 2006

# CANCER SURVIVORS

**54,000 participants in Norway**

**Psychologist followed them 7 years**

**Health status evaluated**

**Those with a good sense of humor at the beginning of the study were associated with a 70% greater survival (don't ask)**

**The same was true with end-stage renal disease population**

# EMOTIONS AND MOOD

Humor allows us to perceive and appreciate incongruities

MICU Hospice Scatter Beds

Lazarus and the Coffin truck (Brooklyn Casket Company)

Mediocre

If you ask Up-to-date about humor, it goes immediately to vitreous

With moments of laughter, our lives have joy and delight

positive emotions create neurochemical changes that buffer the  
immunosuppressive effects of stress



# **'STRESS WITHOUT DISTRESS'**

**Note: Our interpretation of a stressor depends in great part to our perception**

**How we look at a stressful situation (any stressor) determines...**

**Are we THREATENED or CHALLENGED?**

Selye

**Humor gives us a different perspective on our problems**

**What we can make lighter, is less of a threat;**

**Detachment**

**Self-protection**



# LAUGHTER THEORIES

## Arousal theory

stress increases arousal while laughing eases arousal and tension

laughter shows a complex interaction of mind and body / cognition and emotion

## Discrepancy theory

laughter starts from a conflict of what is known and what is perceived

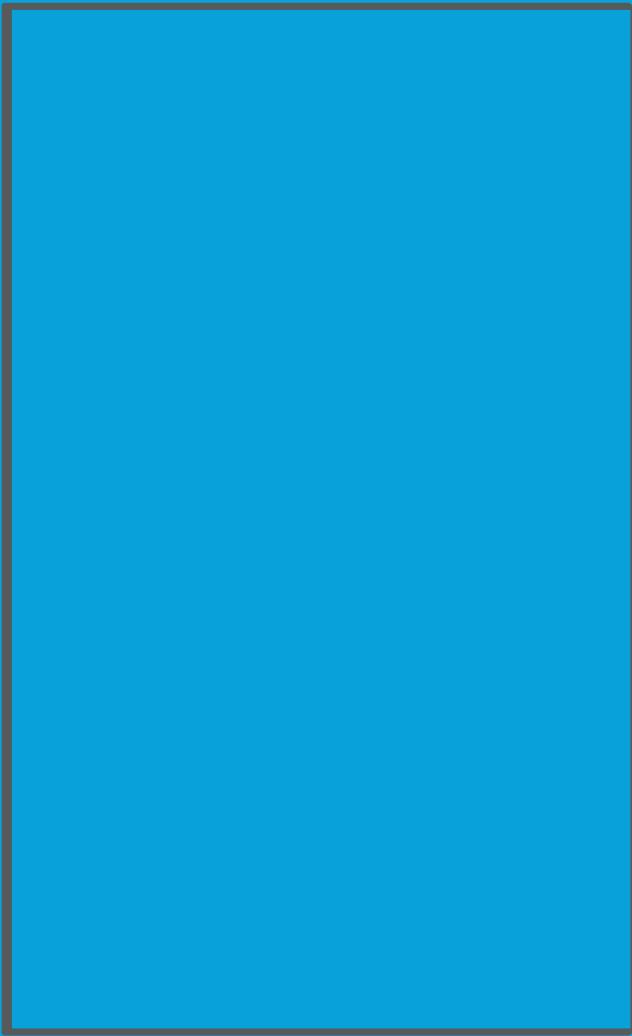
people laugh when they realize the discrepancy “did you see that?”

pleasant enlightenment

## Superiority theory

looking down on others

superiority complex provides a sense of humor





# CATEGORIES OF LAUGHTER

- 1. Genuine or spontaneous (cannot help it)**
- 2. Simulated laughter (self-induced)**
- 3. Stimulated laughter (reflex)**
- 4. Induced laughter (generally drug-induced)**
- 5. Pathological laughter**

**Humor is a powerful form of self-care and can enhance coping skills**

# PAIN

**Laughter can reduce pain and aid in healing**

**Endorphin release**

**Powerful distraction**

**Elevates pain threshold and tolerance**

**Forget about it;**

**we can really only think about one thing at a time**

**Multi-task? Really?**

# DR. WILLIAM FRY

**Humor and laughter produce natural pain killers in the pituitary  
Endorphins!**

**Dr. Fry liked to say, “Humor is a stress antagonist. It decreases physical tension as it increases physical relaxation”**

William Fry, Stanford University

**“Laugh hardily, every 3-4 hours, PRN  
No daily maximum unless incontinent of urine”**

GEBSD, 2017



**Don't Tell Me What Kind of Day to Have**

# APPROPRIATENESS OF HUMOR

**“I’d die, I’d kill myself, Just shoot me”**

**Chronic illness has a negative effect on mood and attitude which may worsen symptoms or disease**

**Humor therapy can help to reduce negative effects of illness, feeling out of control, afraid or feeling helpless**

**Humor therapy can be a preventive measure when encouraged in providers of healthcare (US) of caregivers**

**Appropriate use of humor is completely safe. But make sure you tell your healthcare providers of any and all complimentary therapies you may be employing**

# **NOTE TO SELF**

**Our patients don't lose their sense of humor just because they have an illness,**

**They just aren't thinking beyond their situation.**

**We can help them think beyond**

**Remember back**

**Reflect**

**Refocus**

**Consider**

**As healthcare providers, we connect with a person, **not an illness**. Find that person.**

# HUMOR EXERCISES

Encourage reflection of a funny experience

**The crazier, the better (for remembering)**

Humor Carts

Clowns

Show comedies (“that’s not funny”)

**Chat with someone who makes you Smile or Laugh**

**Laughter therapy is a communication exercise that arouses laughter, smiling, pleasant feelings and enables interaction**

**Laughter is a form of treatment**

A series of cognitive-behavioral therapies

# HUMOR IN THE WORKPLACE

If humor can instill hope and positive feelings in our patients, imagine what it can do for us

Appropriate use of humor creates a sense of community and can improve workplace efficiency

1. Have fun, be celebrative
2. Use what you know; be genuine and honest
3. Make humor a ritual; laugh every day
4. Aim positive, not negative – to bully is not funny

# HUMOR IN THE WORKPLACE...

5. Recognize the value of a smile (laughter may not be necessary. Making people smile is a great success. And hey, most people look better when they smile)
6. Stay professional, Stay appropriate – if you don't know, don't say
7. Own your humor
8. Mix originality with borrowed
9. Understand your audience; humor is subjective
10. Helps others; acts of smiling and humor help almost everyone feel better
11. Gags and practical jokes are rarely appreciated at work
12. Sarcasm may be funny in the bedroom or bar, but it is generally a tool for the bully and is therefore not a part of workplace humor

# MORE ON PSYCHOLOGIC OUTCOMES

Reduces stress, anxiety and tension, improves depression

Elevates mood, self-esteem, hope, energy and vigor

Enhances memory and creative thinking

Improves interpersonal interaction

Increases friendliness and helpfulness

Promotes psychological well-being

Improves quality of life and patient care

Intensifies mirth and is contagious

# HUMOR AND RESILIENCY

**Encourage laughter in all patients, regardless of illness or injury**

**Humor stimulates language processing as well as the brain / reward system**

**Resiliency is the individual's ability to adapt to stress and adversity**

**Evidence indicates that humor can enhance resiliency**

**Cynical or Gallows humor may be an appropriate way to detach and distance**

**Use fun as a teaching moment; cartoons can be a terrific means of education  
that will be remembered**

# **BUT...**

**Humor should not decrease the sense of competency**

**Do not attempt levity during a crisis but recognize nervous laughter**

**Evaluate the surroundings for a readiness for humor therapy**

**Start small; look for a smile**

**Not everyone reacts the same way**

**Laughter can elicit pain**

**Patients in denial may not recognize humor; can we help them?**

**We can laugh at ourselves, even in front of patients; sometimes**

**Consider culture**

**Humor is not a way to deliver bad news**

# WHAT TO DO...

People who are determined to lighten their day, WILL



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**Anything about yourself that is humorous even without purposefulness?**

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Repeat and wash

**ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT COMPUTERS...**

**Remember**



ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT COMPUTERS...

**Remember**

**always set your default to a**



ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT COMPUTERS...

**Remember**

**always set your default to a**

**SMILE**



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# **HUMOR AND LAUGHTER**

**Remember that humor allows a person to feel in control of a situation**

**Humor makes us feel our situation is manageable**

**People release fears, anger and stress**

**Humor improves Quality of Life**

**If indeed, a majority of life's ills are caused by stress, and if laughter can decrease stress, then laughter truly is “the best medicine”**



I can't  
do it



**“Back to Square One”**

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