

WELLNESS TIPS

MANAGING STRESS THROUGH HUMOR

Even in such difficult situations that are currently present with Covid-19, with social distancing and working/studying from home, as well as other circumstances, humorous situations arise. We've all heard the stories of awkward situations of how some people are dressed (or not) or kids and pets wandering through Zoom meetings.

Norman Cousins became famous after his diagnosis of terminal illness in the 1960s for his use of humor in coping and managing his pain by extensively watching Marx Brothers movies.

Research has shown an association between humor and psychological well-being. Psychological changes and strengthened immune system can occur. Also, even muscle movements of faking a smile result in release of endorphins.

Using humor can be beneficial in contributing to temporary decrease in stress. It helps us emotionally distance from a situation and feel less overwhelmed and provides a distraction, refocusing attention from negative and anxious thought, to contributing to improved mood. Physical release of muscle tension occurs, resulting in feeling more relaxed.

Humor supports a more positive, hopeful perspective and provides a different angle for looking at a situation. It also fosters connections with others.

While humor is universal, what is considered amusing and how and where humor is used varies in different cultures.

SOME WAYS TO INCORPORATE HUMOR

- + Post humorous sayings/anecdotes/pictures/items where you will readily see them.
- + Practice laughing at your situations, even if it feels fake at first.
- + When with friends, stage a group laugh. It feels awkward at first, but as it progresses, real laughter breaks out.
- + Watch comedy movies and videos.
- + Take a frustrating situation and exaggerate it in your mind to an extreme, making it incredibly ridiculous and bizarre.
- + Read funny tweets.
- + Read humorous books or other materials.

- + Share amusing anecdotes with others.
- + Look for humor as you go through your day.
- + Make a game of counting everyday frustrations, such as how many red lights you encounter on your drive home and have a contest with friends.
- + Participate in laughter yoga, which combines laughter with yoga breathing techniques.

Find things in your life that are humorous to you. Recognize that what is amusing to you might not be to someone else and be judicious in how you share it and the setting in which you share it.

Know what appropriate humor is and don't engage in humor that is hurtful or at the expense of others.

We all are experiencing some level of stress and laughter is one way we can work to modify our stress response. Give it a try!

Mayo Clinic. Healthy Lifestyle. "Stress Relief from Laughter."

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>

Frontiers in Psychology. "Cultural Differences in Humor Perception, Usage, and Implications." Tonglin Jiang, Hao Li and Yubo Hou. January 29, 2019.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00123/full>

Verywell mind. "Maintaining a Sense of Humor to Cope." June 26, 2020.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/maintain-a-sense-of-humor-3144888>

Forbes. "Using Humor to Manage Stress and Stay Positive." Andie Kramer. May 15, 2020.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andiekramer/2020/05/15/using-humor-to-manage-stress-and-stay-positive/#3e4076fd3125>

As always, feel free to contact MSCC counselors with questions or concerns and to schedule an appointment.

Stay well and stay healthy!

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If you would like to review previous Wellness Tips, check the CCOM Medical Student Counseling Center Website: <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>