



LAUGH IT OFF

Stress is a normal part of life. It can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry or anxious.

Approach life in a more jovial way and you'll find you're less stressed and worried about negative events. Best of all, you'll achieve the health benefits of laughter.

LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Laughter can ease tense situations and improve relationships. But the benefits don't stop there. It's well known that the sheer physical act of laughing—even when you fake it—can improve mental and physical health. Studies at Stanford University, for example, have found that a 2-minute belly laugh is equal to 10 minutes on a rowing machine in terms of boosting your heart rate. A good laugh also:

- relaxes muscles
- deepens breathing
- elevates oxygen levels
- numbs pain by stimulating endorphins
- heightens energy
- reduces tension
- alleviates depression
- boosts your immune system

JUST L-A-U-G-H

Learn to replace worried, anxious or stressful thoughts with laughter. Take these steps:

- Let it go.
- Assess the situation.
- Up the ante.
- Go for it.
- Have a blast.

GET A SENSE OF HUMOR

When you were a child, experts estimate that you probably laughed 400 times a day. Now you're lucky to manage 15 chuckles. You can learn to laugh at yourself, laugh more often and see the humor in everyday situations. Try the following:

- Choose funny TV shows, comics, movies and books over depressing ones.
- Stop waiting to be happy—try to find some pleasure in today.
- Be grateful—say thanks to the driver who didn't hit you or the virus you didn't get.
- Smile at the person next to you when you're stuck in line.
- Make a joke at your expense, not someone else's; laughing at yourself is cool, laughing at others is mean.

IT'S OK TO FAKE IT

If you can't find something funny to laugh about, then fake it, say humor therapists. Your body can't tell the difference between a fake laugh and a real one and, in most cases, you'll end up laughing naturally.

If you can't laugh, then smile. According to the "Facial Feedback" theory, a person who forces a smile soon begins to experience the pleasurable feelings associated with that expression.

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