

Health Notes by Evelyn Ames Laugh for the Health of It! Part 2

"I realize that humor isn't for everyone. It's only for people who want to have fun, enjoy life, and feel alive." Anne Wilson Schaefer

According to the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, humor can be described as a whole brain or whole person experience comprised of: Wit, the cognitive experience; Mirth, the feel good emotional experience enhanced when shared with others; and Laughter, the reflexive contagious physiological experience (though we don't need to laugh to experience humor). The following information comes from HelpGuide, a project of the Rotary Club of Santa Monica and Center for Healthy Aging.

The difference between hurtful and healthful humor. Healthful humor stimulates wit, mirth, or laughter. It creates closeness and intimacy between people. Hurtful humor creates pain and distance. Often healthful humor pokes fun at oneself and situations while harmful humor pokes fun at other individuals or groups. Sarcasm, put downs, ethnic jokes, and anti jokes (anti men, women, religious groups, nationalities, ethnicity, etc) are all considered hurtful as opposed to therapeutic. "Laughing with others is an ice breaker while laughing at others is an ice maker."

Humor improves mental and emotional health. "Humor is a powerful emotional medicine that can lower stress, dissolve anger and unite families in troubled times." Striving to find humor in difficult situations elevates mood, and laughing at ourselves makes us realize that small things are not earth-shaking events. Humor "helps us avoid loneliness by connecting with others who are attracted to genuine cheerfulness." "It is not situations that generate our stress, it is the meaning we place on the situations. Humor adjusts the meaning of an event so that it is not so overwhelming."

Mental/Emotional Health Benefits of Laughter include:

- enhancing our ability to affiliate or connect with others.
- helping us replace distressing emotions with pleasurable feelings.
- changing our behavior – when we experience humor we talk more, make more eye contact with others, and touch others.
- increasing our energy. With increased energy we may perform activities that we might otherwise avoid.
- making us feel good!

A funny from Maxine: "Getting older is like visiting an all-you-can-eat buffet. What should be hot is cold, what should be firm is limp, and the buns are bigger than anything on the menu!"

How you can expand your sense of humor. A sense of humor is developed by putting time, focus and energy into experiences that make us laugh and feel good. The tips below can help you add to your capacity for laughter.

- **Look for the everyday humor.** Look for absurd, silly, incongruous activities each day.
- **Observe infants and young children** to find delight and amusement in the most ordinary things.
- **Increase your exposure to comedies**, comic sitcoms, joke books, comedy clubs, etc.
- **Hang around funny friends.**
- **Take a 5-10 minute humor break each day.** Read jokes, add to a humor notebook, or listen to a funny CD/DVD. (If you like classical music, listen to Anna Russell's "analysis" of Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelungs, or her rendition of how to write your own Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. For those of you who remember when Andy Griffith was a comedian, listen to his CD on "What it was, was football" or his take of "Opera Carmen.")
- **If you hear a joke you really like, write it down**, or tell it to someone to help you remember it.
- **Remind yourself to have fun.**
- **Spend time with those who help you see the bright side.**
- **Avoid conversation/news/entertainment** that upset and distress you or make you feel sad and unhappy. Wow! A toughie in today's world!

Victor Borge said "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."