

WHY IS HUMOR IMPORTANT?

He who laughs.. .lasts. Although leading a humorless life is not fatal, It can be unhealthy psychologically. Humor serves as a balance pole on the tightrope of life. Humor Is a powerful force in releasing stress's strangle hold. In fact, humor Is such a powerful antidote to stress that many corporations hire humor consultants to "lighten up" office environments.

HOW TO INJECT HUMOR INTO YOUR LIFE

Know yourself. Find your "sore spots" and apply humor like you would a soothing salve. For example, if your daily encounter with a computer makes you sore, find cartoons that make fun of computers. (Whole books have been devoted to making light of irritations, e.g. 101 Uses for Your Discarded Computer). You may have to put the cartoons in a file where you can pull them out.

Laughter is a natural "mood elevator," and according to a Cornell University study, also increases creativity and flexibility of thought. Humor gives a more balanced sense of perspective. Appropriately timed humor has even been found to be useful in alleviating the pain of injections as well as post-operative pain (Cousins: Headfirst, The Biology of Hope, 1989, p. 133).

HOW HUMOR LIFTS MOODS

The main mechanism of humor or laughter appears to be the release of endorphins or the brain's natural tranquilizer into the system. Laughing results in an "endorphin high." Furthermore, laughter stimulates internal organs "making them work better through the increase of circulation that follows the vibrating massage that accompanies it and heightens resistive vitality against disease" (Walsh in Cousins Ibid. pp. 131-132).

It is a common experience that we smile because we are happy. Interestingly, it has been discovered that our smile also causes our feelings of happiness. That is, the act of smiling elevates moods.

Go on a "humor diet." Optimism is the breakfast of champions. Instead of waking up to "Doom and Gloom" news, listen to upbeat radio stations. Find a radio station that "centerpieces" humor. (A local radio station features a "bad joke Thursday" which gets everyone off to a good start.) Calendars are available which feature a daily cartoon or joke. When reading the newspaper, focus on the "funnies" first before finding out all the negative things thousands of people have done lately. Watch movies , listen to tapes or read books that are humorous. Duke University (Comprehensive Cancer Center) offers a very extensive list of humorous books, audiocassettes, and videocassettes. (Contact Dr. Ron Rubenzer for a copy of this list.) There are cable channels that feature only "light" programs.