



# Fact Sheet

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Families: the strongest link

## Tickle Your Stress Before It Tackles You

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Regardless of who you are or what you do, chances are you spend a lot of time racing the clock, worrying about getting everything done, and feeling out of control. A recent Gallup poll found that 40 percent of Americans feel stressed every day and another 39 percent are sometimes stressed. Most people don't have a good handle on their stress. They focus on the unpleasant, and usually unexpected things that happen daily. That's not just stress, it's life.

There is a major difference between stressors—those things that happen every day that have the potential for driving us crazy, or making us angry, frustrated, and hurt—and stress, the way we choose to respond to these stressors. You make a choice about how situations will affect the rest of your day. Why not make humor choices and practice them every day?

### Humor Makes Life Easier

Humor can be a powerful and effective mechanism for coping with stress, especially when combined with other means of stress reduction. The real power of humor and laughter shows up when you learn to use it under stress. It keeps things in perspective, helps dispel negative emotions, and puts you in a frame of mind that can help you better cope with the situation. Combining stress management techniques with a humorous outlook on life won't make you stress-proof, but it can make the bad things easier to endure.

If you're willing to laugh at the little disasters in life, you'll find that other areas of your life will also become easier. Laughter, especially when you laugh at yourself, does many important things:

- It empowers you. When you laugh at your setbacks, you no longer feel sorry for yourself. You feel uplifted and encouraged.
- It helps you communicate more effectively.
- It makes you more likeable.
- It helps you cope. "Nothing erases unpleasant thoughts more effectively than concentration on pleasant ones." (Hans Selye, stress researcher)
- It provides perspective by removing you from your problems. Everyone makes mistakes, and we need to remember that, "I may not be totally perfect, but parts of me are excellent." (Ashleigh Brilliant)
- People tend to be less threatened by you.

### Using Humor Effectively

You may agree that laughing will help with your stress but agreeing with this doesn't always help when the kids fight, miss the bus, and leave you late for work. To use humor effectively to cope with stress, you need to understand your own humor and how willing you are to laugh, have a humor plan, and practice using humor skills until they are comfortable.

Everyone has his or her own sense of humor. If you're not attuned to yours, you'll end up missing many opportunities to use humor skills to deal with life's little stressors. Being an adult is serious business, but so many people have lost the sheer capacity for fun, joy, and laughter. Even when the opportunity is there, we miss it. Many adults have this problem that can be called "humor impairment." Simply defined, it means the inability to find humor even in situations that are funny to most people.

Stress can cause humor impairment. Fortunately, it is possible to change.

### Finding the Funny in Life

You don't have to laugh out loud to find something funny, but you do need to recognize the types of humor you will be able to use most effectively to manage stress. Do you like slapstick humor or verbal humor? Do you understand what kinds of humor offend you? Do you like jokes that focus on things you have in common with the comedian? Do you like humor built on current events? Do you like wordplay and puns? Do you like to see props and gimmicks? Do you find humor in things that weren't necessarily meant to be funny? Answering these questions will help you identify what humor to seek to help reduce stress and have more fun in life. You also need to ask yourself how long you hold on to misery before letting loose with humor.

### Making a Humor Plan

You'll need a plan to deal with your daily stressors. First, make a list of all the things that happen regularly that almost always set off your stress response. Make your

list as specific and detailed as possible. Things you might include are: people, habits, personality quirks, situations, things, and events. Write these things down so you have a good idea of the types of things you need to combat with humor. You'll also need to make a "happy" list—anything that makes you happy or makes you laugh. When you have to deal with one of your stressors, combat it with your tools for humor.

### Adding Humor to Your Life

You'll always have stress in your life. The key to using humor to deal effectively with your stress is to put more humor in your life. If you're surrounded by things that make you laugh, they can make the bad things easier to take. If you savor humor, it can be a lifesaver. Don't take life too seriously; it's only a temporary situation.

### References

- Jasheway, Leigh Anne. *Don't Get Mad, Get Funny!* Pfeiffer-Hamilton, Duluth, Minnesota, 1996.
- Klein, Allen. *The Healing Power of Humor*. Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles, 1989.