

# HumorMatters™



## Larry, Moe, and Curly—Jest for Perspective?

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*A client walks into an AIDS Services Office proudly reporting his T-cell count of 3. He states that he affectionately named them Larry, Moe, and Curly.*

This client's humorous perspective on his disease strengthens his ability to cope with it. Humor is a powerful coping mechanism for anyone facing the pain of AIDS. Humor immediately and swiftly improves the quality of life. It helps us to cope with life's most difficult situations, and provides perspective. Humor also helps us to communicate to others—when we share our humor, we reach out and connect with others.

In *Doonesbury*, when Andy, a character with AIDS jokes about the disease to Joanie, she asks, "How can you joke?" Andy responds, "How can you not?" AIDS is not funny, yet I have not talked with anyone affected by the epidemic who does not have at least one humorous story related to the disease.

Many jokes, anecdotes, and stories, have evolved from the AIDS epidemic. There is the story of the IV drug users in a New York drug "shooting gallery." A social worker discovers them sharing needles and is appalled. She turns to one and asks, "Do you know what you're doing? Haven't you heard about AIDS?" He turns to her and

casually replies, "Don't worry about us. We are all wearing condoms."

There is also the story of a 4th grade boy who returns home after an AIDS awareness day at school. His mother asks him what he learned and he replies, "I'm not quite sure, but I think we were supposed to stay out of intersections and buy condominiums." Humor allows the messages to be heard and remembered.

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### **Benefits of Humor**

While laughing at the disease will not help find a cure, it can ease the suffering and *may* reduce physical and emotional pain. Norman Cousins, who had an exceptionally painful disease of the connective tissue, found that 10-20 minutes of deep laughter provided him with 2 hours or more of pain free existence. Subsequent research has found that certain health maintaining chemicals are released during laughter. While this research is in its early phases, there appear to be physiological benefits derived from laughter.

Even if there were no physiological benefits, humor is psychologically helpful because it helps us to better accept life's challenging situations. It helps provide a stress reducing perspective on our

day-to-day living. Humor also can help us maintain a healthy “attitude” which is crucial for our physical and psychological well being.

### **Humor Improves Communication**

Humor can be a non-threatening way of communicating. Messages we wish to give to significant others, family members, medical professional, etc. may be improved with a little humor. The message will be communicated with less stress and is likely to have a greater impact. Consider the poster hanging in a medical clinic, picturing an elderly woman peering over her bifocals and saying, “Don’t forget your rubbers.” We hear the message and it probably has more impact than a poster that says, “Don’t forget to wear a condom.” We receive the message in a light, non-threatening way.

### **Increasing Your Humor Quotient**

Having AIDS certainly changes and challenges your life, and how you choose to lead your life with the disease will have a great impact on your physical and psychological health. Your health, both psychological and physical, is based not only on “living” with AIDS but also on your reaction to “living with AIDS.” We know attitude has a great influence on the quality of life. A humorous perspective can maintain a healthy attitude.

All of us can increase our ability to receive humor—which is called our “humor quotient.” Allow yourself to discover the humor around you. You will find it in bed pans, I.V.’s, bathrooms, churches, hospitals, homes, etc. A great deal of humor can be discovered with significant others, family, friends, doctors, nurses, medical and support staff, etc.

Incorporating humor into your life is an individual choice. Other opportunities to share humor include: reporting day-to-day experiences, reading cartoons, exchanging jokes, watching favorite funny videos, listening to comedians, singing songs, reading literature, etc.

In the final analysis, *Humor Feels Good*. In those moments when we experience humor, we cannot feel other distressing emotions such as anxiety, depression, or anger. Humor provides a respite from distress.

“How can we joke about AIDS?” In Andy’s words, “How can we not!”

