

HumorMatters™



Tickling Our Funny Bone; The *Fun*-da-mentals By Steven M. Sultanoff, Ph.D.

Subtitle: HUMOR MATTERS IN HEALTH

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If humor is "the best medicine," then how do we sustain it as a central part of our day-to-day lifestyle? While isolated humorous experiences where we fall over with laughter are an important aspect of the health potential of humor, the greatest benefits of humor lie in our *daily* ability to use humor to reduce emotional and physical distress which may ultimately lead to increased wellness.

Jest for the Health of It

Expanding our "comic vision" is one way to increase our humorous lifestyle. Comic vision is the ability to perceive the humor around us and begins with discovering what tickles our funny bone. Some of us enjoy jokes or cartoons while others find humor in daily incongruities such as seeing a sign in a store that reads, "Children left unattended will be towed at the owner's expense." Our comic vision expands as we then share our humor with others.

Weave Your Web

Surfing the internet can be a great adventure to expand our comic vision.

To locate a listing of many humor sites on the web, visit my web site at www.humormatters.com. At www.Joke_of_the_Day.com, you can join a mailing list and receive a new joke every day or, if you are really "serious about humor," you can explore the American Association for Therapeutic Humor at www.aath.org.

Make a Prop-Position

Props are a fun way to add humor to your lifestyle. Carry a clown nose for a week and wear it at least once a day. (I blow bubbles from my car while stopped at traffic lights or while waiting in line at a drive-through fast food restaurant.) For those of you who prefer a more subtle approach, try wearing a humorous pin or keeping a set of wind-up toys or koosh balls at your work station. A few moments of fun for you and your coworkers can result in renewed energy and help you deal with frustrating problems. Many novelty shops and toy stores carry a wide assortment of toys and pins for every taste. One of my favorites pins reads, "My reality check just bounced."

Play with Your Mental Blocks

Read signs around you and take meanings literally. For example, at the end of a cafeteria line in Las Vegas I read a sign that stated "We only accept US travelers checks." I turned to the cashier and said, "I guess I will have to put everything back. I only have cash!" The sign wasn't meant to be funny, but I read it literally, and it became funny (at least to me). By sharing my humor with the cashier, I attempted to lighten her day, as well.

Commit Yourself

Begin by committing yourself to do one thing in the next week to increase your comic vision and learn to share your "vision" with others. Carry and use a prop, learn and share a joke, e-mail something funny, make fun of yourself, exaggerate a situation, etc.

What Tickles Your Funny Bone?

As for your individual sense of humor, the question is not what is humorous, but what is humorous to *you*. The healing nature of humor is experienced through your *wit*, *mirth*, and *laughter*.

Wit:

The Mental Experience of Humor

As we experience wit we *intellectually* appreciate, understand, and "get" the humor. Wit helps us break up our rigid ways of thinking associated with emotional distress--such as depression, anxiety, and anger--it also helps us to see the world with perspective, thus reducing the impact of the stressors around us.

Mirth:

The Emotional Experience of Humor

Mirth is the experience of uplifting

emotions such as joy, pleasure, or inner warmth associated with humor.

Distressing emotions and mirth cannot *occupy* the same psychological space. As we experience mirth, our inner distresses dissolve and a pleasant, sunny spirit takes their place. We know this intuitively as illustrated by someone using humor "instinctively" to reduce another's anger. Many of us have been in a situation where, in the midst of being angry at a friend, our friend uses humor to dispel our emotional intensity. Some of us have even been known to say, "Don't make me laugh! I want to be angry."

Laughter:

The Physiological Experience of Humor

Laughter is the physiological reaction to humor. The research on laughter, while limited, indicates that there are physiological benefits from laughter including an increase in certain antibodies, a reduction of specific stress hormones, and an increased tolerance to pain. (I usually listen to humorous tapes on the way to see the dentist to reduce discomfort in the dentist's chair.)

By learning to tickle our respective funny bones, we stimulate our own, and possibly other's, wit, mirth, and laughter. As we strive to live a lifestyle incorporating humor, we lessen the emotional and physical stresses increasing our health and well being. Indeed, humor may be the best medicine to keep us emotionally, mentally, and physically fit. 