

# Humor – It Works!!!

Charlie Rickman, WVU Extension Agent, Cabell County  
Linda J. Waybright, WVU Extension Agent, Jackson County

*“A good laugh is like manure to a farmer—  
it doesn’t do any good until you spread it around.”*

– Michael Pritchard

## Introduction

Have you ever heard someone say, “She sure has a good sense of humor”? What did they mean by *humor*? Webster’s Dictionary defines humor as a “quality of imagination, quick to perceive the ludicrous or to express oneself in an amusing way.” Other terms used to define humor are fun *caprice*, and *state of mind*. When we speak of humor, we most often are thinking of disposition, state of mind, amusement, and – yes – laughter. In fact, we often use the term *humor* interchangeably with laughter.

## The Importance of Humor

Your sense of humor is a powerful tool in improving your daily mood and emotional state. Humor helps you maintain a healthy lifestyle. It is increasingly promoted by health care professionals.

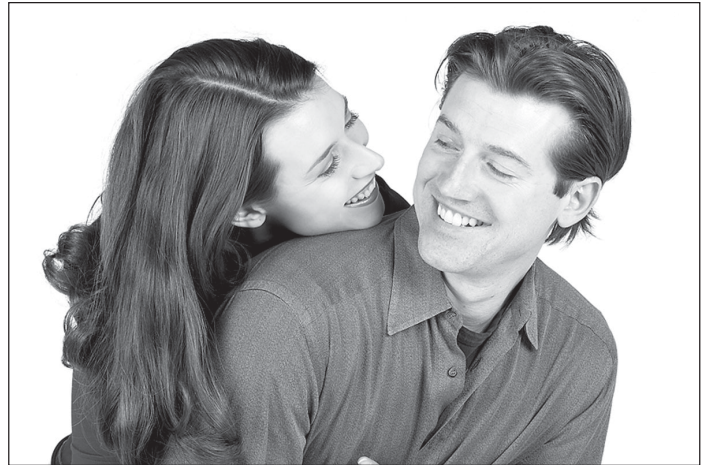
## How Humor Works

Good humor or laughter can be therapeutic in a number of ways. Humor works to improve physical reactions in our bodies, and humor also helps us in everyday experiences.

Humor works to help in:

☺ **Reducing Stress** – Researchers noted a significant drop in the stress hormones cortisol and adrenalin in participants who watched a 60-minute funny video. This is important because those hormones can affect the immune system and weaken its ability to deter diseases.

☺ **Reducing Pain** – Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body’s natural pain killers.



Studies have shown that surgical patients who had humor as part of their postsurgical treatment had less perception of pain as compared with patients not having humor in their treatment.

- ☺ **Improving Cardiovascular System** – Laughter increases the heart rate and the breathing rate, bringing oxygen into the body. This stimulates the circulatory system.
- ☺ **Lowering Blood Pressure** – With an improved cardiovascular system, lymphatic fluids are increased, which promotes lowering of the blood pressure.
- ☺ **Promoting a Sense of Well-being** – When a person hears a joke, the brain processes it before laughter begins. Laughing in a tense situation may be difficult, but laughter can put the situation into perspective and provide temporary relief from worry. A sense of humor helps us process and appreciate life’s moments that can provide joy and delight. Bill Cosby has made the statement, “If you can laugh at it, you can survive it.”

*“Two things reduce prejudice: education and laughter.”*

– Laurence J. Peters

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### Using Humor Effectively

For humor to be effective, it must not be hurtful or offensive to others. Laughing with ourselves and others, and not at others, is the key using humor effectively. In other words, make fun of the situation, not the person.

Humor can be used to “break the ice” in a tense or serious situation. Humorous situations can uplift the mood of individuals or groups. After visiting a terminally ill relative, several family members were talking when one asked if anyone had a stick of gum. A cousin searched her purse and said, quite seriously, “No, but I have a suppository.” For a few minutes, the seriousness of the situation was relaxed. The family could embrace one another while laughing at an unexpected response to a simple question.

Humor can also spread goodwill. Humor is a way of unifying a group – a shared humorous experience increases the bonds between families, friends, or co-workers – as it creates rapport with others. Ben Franklin said it well, “Joy is not in things; it is in us.”

Joke-telling is not the only way to transmit humor. Here are three tips to get you going:

- ☺ Put humor in your surroundings.
- ☺ Use humor as a tool rather than as a weapon.
- ☺ Life doesn’t need to be boring nor dull. Build humor into your family culture.

### Make Humor Part of Life

How can you make humor a part of your everyday life? Using laughter to de-stress can be an inexpensive way to put humor in your daily life. Start by making funny friends. Identify the people you know who use humor often and well. Maintain regular contact with those people. When you feel overstressed, make sure that you seek advice from one or more funny friends.

“Joke Formulas” can provide structure and help us see the jokes life plays on us. Some of these formulas follow.

- ☺ Comparison: Compare something to something out of the ordinary or just funny in nature.
- ☺ Definition: Redefine a word comedically.
- ☺ Lists: Think of phrases or words on a theme, some or all of which are funny.



### Resources

Goodman, Joel, *Laffirmations: 1001 Ways to Add Humor to Your Life*, Health Communications, Inc., 1995.

Goodman, Joel, *Taking Humor Seriously*, The Humor Project, Inc., ([www.humorproject.com](http://www.humorproject.com))

Jasheway, Leigh Anne, *Don't Get Mad, Get Funny!*, Whole Persons Associates, Inc., 1996.

McGhee, Paul E., PhD, *They Who Laugh, Last, Health, Humor and the Amuse System: Humor as Survival Training*, 1999 (<http://laughterremedy.com>)

Warnock, Peter, “You Don’t Have to Be Funny to Use Humor,” *Journal of Extension*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1988.

Humor Therapy ([www.holistic-online.com](http://www.holistic-online.com))

Humor: How Does it Work? ([www.holistic-online.com](http://www.holistic-online.com))

Laughter Is Really Good Medicine ([www.ohioline.osu.edu](http://www.ohioline.osu.edu))

The Benefits of Humor ([www.laughterremedy.com](http://www.laughterremedy.com))