

ARTICLE AND TIPS: Laughter Reduces Teen Stress

Self-Care

CWK Network

“Laughter is an antidote to a lot of things that are not good for us; it’s an antidote physically.” -- Rebecca Jones, Ph.D., psychologist

As with many teenagers, 17-year-olds Tyler Marquardt, Amy Schwartz and Laura Waide have their share of stress.

“During school with AP honors teachers and three tests in a day is a lot,” says Tyler.

“I did have a [boyfriend] breakup about a week ago. It was tough; I really wasn’t prepared for it,” says Amy.

“I don’t have any money because I have no job,” says Laura.

But whatever their worries, they still share plenty of laughs.

“Laughing definitely heals you more I would say ... than dwelling on your sadness,” says Amy.

Under stress, the body produces a hormone called cortisol, which raises blood pressure and blood sugar. However, researchers at Loma Linda University in California report that laughter reduces cortisol and at the same time, boosts the immune system by producing antibodies.

“Pretty amazing finding because it’s a direct link between the act of laughing and a physiological response,” says Psychologist Rebecca Jones, Ph.D.

In fact, the researchers report that laughing offers the same kind of benefit to the heart as exercise.

“If you laugh a hundred times, it’s about the equivalent of doing something cardiovascular for ten to 15 minutes,” explains Jones.

“I actually do believe that,” says Laura, “because I always get really worked up and feel my heart rate increasing when I’m having a really good time or laughing all the time.”

That’s why experts say parents concerned about their child’s health shouldn’t just focus on diet and exercise.

“When [parents are] scanning their teenager’s behavior, they’re paying attention to the things they need to change. We need to have an eye also for the things we need to encourage, and one of those things is good humor,” says Jones.

Amy says her parents are good at that. “My family, we’re big and we’re loud. We’re always trying to entertain each other and pick each other up.”

Tip Sheet

- Use humor to buffer bad feelings and situations. A child who learns to use humor will be better able to keep things in perspective. (Cynthia E. Johnson, Extension Human Development Specialist)
- Without humor, one’s thought processes are likely to become stuck and narrowly focused, leading to increased distress. (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor)
- A good sense of humor and the ability to laugh at stressful situations helps reduce the damaging physical effects of distressing emotions. (The University of Maryland Medical Center)
- Laughter, along with an active sense of humor, may help protect you against a heart attack. (The University of Maryland Medical Center)
- Proper rest and good nutrition can also help increase your child’s coping skills, as can supportive parenting. (Children’s Hospital & Regional Medical Center)

References

- Loma Linda University
- University of Maryland Medical Center