

Laughter May Be Effective Medicine for These Trying Times

October 14, 2020

Some enlightened doctors, nurses and therapists have a prescription for helping all of us to get through this seemingly never-ending pandemic: Try a little laughter.

Humor is not just a distraction from the grim reality of the crisis, said Dr. Michael Miller, a cardiologist at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore. It's a winning strategy to stay healthy in the face of it.

"Heightened stress magnifies the risk of cardiovascular events, including heart attacks and strokes," Dr. Miller said. "Having a good sense of humor is an excellent way to relieve stress and anxiety and bring back a sense of normalcy during these turbulent times."

[Laughter releases nitric oxide](#), a chemical that relaxes blood vessels, reduces blood pressure and decreases clotting, Dr. Miller said. An [epidemiological study](#) of older men and women in Japan confirmed that those who tend to laugh more have a lower risk of major cardiovascular illness. Possessing a healthy sense of humor is also associated with living longer, an [epidemiological study from Norway reported](#), although the correlation appears to be stronger for women than for men.

Armed with this growing body of research, Dr. Miller prescribes "one good belly laugh a day" for his patients. It's not just going "ha, ha," he explained, but a "deep physiological laugh that elicits tears of joys and relaxation."

While the long-term impacts of such a practice remain unknown, Sophie Scott, a neuroscientist at University College London, said that laughter has also been shown to reduce the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline and increases the body's uptake of the feel-good endorphins.

There also appear to be cognitive benefits. Watching a funny video was tied to [improvements in short-term memory in older adults](#) and increased their capacity to learn, research conducted by Dr. Gurinder Singh Bains of Loma Linda University found.

Perhaps most relevant today, possessing a sense of humor also helps people remain resilient in the face of adverse circumstances, said George Bonanno, a professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University.

In one study, Dr. Bonanno [interviewed young women who had been sexually abused](#) and noted their facial expressions. "Those who managed to laugh or smile at moments during their interview were more likely to be doing better two years later than those who had not," he said. "Humor keeps negative emotions in check and gives us a different perspective, allowing us to see some of the bad things that happen to us as a challenge rather than a threat."

