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## **Tickle Your Stress Before It Tackles You**

No matter who you are or what you do, chances are you spend a lot of time racing the clock, worrying about family matters, and feeling out of control.

A recent Gallup poll found that 40 percent of Americans feel stressed every day and another 39 percent are sometimes stressed.

Most people don't have a good handle on their stress. They focus on the unpleasant, and usually unexpected, things that happen every day. That's not just stress, it's life.

There is a major difference between stressors - those things that happen every day that have the potential for driving us crazy, or making us angry, frustrated, and hurt - and stress, the way we choose to respond to these stressors. You make a choice about how situations will affect the rest of your day. Why not make humorous choices and practice them every day?

### **Humor Makes Life Easier**

Humor can be a powerful and effective tool for coping with stress, especially if you use it with other stress reduction techniques that work for you.

The real power of humor and laughter shows up when you learn to use it under stress. It keeps things in perspective, helps dispel negative emotions, and puts you in a frame of mind to cope with the situation. Combining stress-management techniques with a humorous outlook on life won't make you stress-proof, but it can make the bad things easier to take.

If you're willing to laugh at the little disasters in life, you'll find that other areas of your life will also become easier.

### **Using Humor Effectively**

While you may agree that laughing helps your stress, it doesn't always help when the kids are fighting, you missed an important phone call, and the car broke down. To use humor effectively to cope with stress, you need to understand your own humor and how willing you are to laugh, have a humor plan, and practice using humor skills until they are comfortable.

Everyone has their own sense of humor and if you're not attuned to yours, you'll end up missing many opportunities to use humor skills to deal with life's little stressors.

Being an adult is serious business but so many people have lost the sheer capacity for fun, joy, and laughter. Even when the opportunity is there, we miss it. Many adults have this "humor impairment" problem. They can't seem to find humor even in situations funny to most people. Stress can cause humor impairment. Fortunately, it is possible to change.

## **Finding the Funny in Life**

You don't have to laugh out loud to find something funny, but you do need to recognize the types of humor you can use most effectively to manage stress.

Do you like slapstick humor or verbal humor? Do you understand what kinds of humor offend you? Do you like jokes that focus on things you have in common with the comedian? Do you like humor built on current events? Do you like wordplay and puns? Do you like to see props and gimmicks? Do you find humor in things that weren't necessarily meant to be funny?

Answering these questions will help you identify what humor to seek out to help reduce stress and have more fun in life. You also need to ask yourself how long you hold on to misery before letting loose with humor.

## **Making a Humor Plan**

You'll need a plan to deal with your daily stressors. First, make a list of all the things that happen regularly that almost always set off your stress response. Make your list as specific and detailed as possible. Things you might include are people, habits, personality quirks, situations, things, and events. Write these things down so you have a good idea of the types of things you need to combat with humor.

You'll also need to make a 'happy' list - anything that makes you happy or makes you laugh. When you have to deal with one of your stressors, combat it with your tools of humor.

## **Adding Humor to Your Life**

You'll always have stress in your life. The key to using humor to deal effectively with your stress is to put more humor in your life. If you're surrounded by things that make you laugh, they can make the bad things easier to take. If you savor humor, it can be a lifesaver. Don't take life too seriously, it's only a temporary situation.