

# Combat stress with laughter

**NO SWEAT YORK** Amanda Staub, For No Sweat York 6:49 p.m. EDT April 26, 2016

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We've all heard the adage "laughter is the best medicine."

Laughter has a variety of short-term and long-term benefits.

In honor of April, [National Humor Month](#), let's take a look: How does it work?



Laughter has short and long-term benefits. (Photo: funduck, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Laughter begins with a smile. The muscles used in the face to create a smile also trigger the release of chemicals in the brain that make us feel good and combat the stress hormones that build up in our bodies.

Laughter increases circulation by increasing the amount of oxygen intake in the body. (Don't believe me? Take notice of your heartbeat and then take five quick, deep breaths. Take notice of your heartbeat again.) Increased oxygen in the bloodstream also leads to being more alert.

Laughing on a regular basis leads to lower blood pressure and increases the effectiveness of the immune system. It also provides a workout to your abdominal, diaphragm, respiratory, leg, facial and back muscles. Laughing heartily for 15 minutes a day is as good as a workout in the gym.





Most importantly, laughter is a social gel. By just looking at a picture of a person smiling or laughing, we feel more connected to others. This contagious nature of laughter is a glue that brings people together. Humans are social creatures and thrive in social settings where acceptance and joy abound.

Here are some simple exercises to help improve your mood in less than 10 minutes.

1. **The Pencil Test:** Use a clean pen or pencil and hold it horizontally with your teeth for 10 seconds. This action uses the same muscles as a smile and sends the same chemical signals to the brain. Repeat this three times and take notice of your overall mood.
2. **Mirror Image:** Smile while looking into the mirror. Notice the curved lines in your mouth and cheeks. Allow yourself to giggle at how something simple, like your face has changed over the years. Allow the giggle to turn into a laugh and watch the transformation in your eyes. Save this image in your mind to be able to reproduce later in the day.
3. **The Challenge:** Challenge yourself to see how many people you make smile back at you while on your way to work. (This can be from smiling and waving at people from the car, to making eye contact and smiling at people in the hallway.)


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