

# Humor, Laughter, and Aging

*“He who laughs, lasts.” —Anonymous*

## Introduction

Why should senior adults be concerned about humor? You have probably heard that “Laughter is the best medicine” and that “He who laughs, lasts.” Well, those sayings are true! Humor and the subsequent laughter have many therapeutic effects on the body. Laughing not only improves your mood and emotional state, it also has many social and physical health benefits. Most of us don’t take humor seriously enough. We need to learn to use it effectively and make it part of our life.

## Physical Benefits of Laughter

- Improved cardiovascular health
- Improved respiration
- Lowered blood pressure
- Reduced pain
- Enhanced immune system
- Decreased “stress” hormones
- Muscle relaxation



## Mental Benefits of Laughter

- Improves brain functions
- Improves disposition
- Releases pent-up feelings of anger and frustration
- Reduces tension
- Lowers anxiety
- Increases energy
- Enhances creativity



## Social Benefits of Laughter

- Makes us feel good
- Helps avoid loneliness
- Changes behavior
- Enhances ability to affiliate or connect with others

## Humor Differences with Age

Different people find different things funny. Senior adults tend to laugh at other people and themselves in shared common predicaments and embarrassments. The senior adult sense of humor is usually characterized as more subtle, more tolerant and less judgmental about the differences in people. The things seniors find funny as a result of age or developmental stage seem to be related to the stressors experienced during this time.

## Adding Humor to Your Life

It's important to seek out and take advantage of opportunities to laugh every day. Below are some suggestions for adding humor to your life:

- **Remind yourself to have fun:** Life shouldn't be boring, it should be fun! For example, tell funny stories about yourself and let your children and grandchildren laugh with you.
- **Hang around with people who make you laugh:** Spend time with those who help you see the bright side of life, and when possible, avoid those people who are negative.
- **Look for humor everyday:** Start looking for funny things. Look for the absurd, silly, incongruous activities that go on around you each day and laugh at them.
- **Put humor into your surroundings:** Do you have a funny saying you like? Write it down and put it on the refrigerator. Try buying a daily calendar with a new joke each morning. Is there an object, like a stuffed animal, that always makes you smile? Put it in your living room where you will see it often.
- **Take a "fun break" every day to laugh:** Schedule it in if necessary. Read jokes. Start a humor notebook. Listen to a funny tape. Watch a comedy like *I Love Lucy*.
- **Figure out what makes you laugh, then do it:** Need help figuring out what makes you laugh? Answer the questions in the following Humor Assessment.

## Humor Assessment

Answer the following questions to help determine what makes you laugh.

1. What makes you laugh? At home? At work? On TV? In the movies? In books? In cartoons? What kind of humor role do you prefer?
2. When do you laugh the most? When you are under pressure, by yourself, or with others?
3. Where do you laugh the most? Are you at home, at work, on vacation?
4. With whom do you laugh the most?
5. Where do you laugh the least?

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