

# WELL BALANCED

- APRIL 2025 -

National Stress Awareness Month and National Humor Month

## Laughing YOUR WAY TOWARD LESS Stress



Everyone experiences stress. It is a normal and unavoidable part of being human. Stress can be both positive and negative, and managing it effectively can improve physical and mental well-being.

The American Institute of Stress identifies four types of stress:

- **Eustress**—Stress that is motivating and has positive outcomes, such as earning a degree, receiving a promotion, or getting married.
- **Distress**—Stress that is discouraging and has negative implications, like financial challenges, project setbacks at work, or conflicts with family members.
- **Acute Stress**—Short-term, intense stress that triggers the fight-or-flight response. It can occur in situations like giving a speech, taking an exam, or experiencing a car accident.
- **Chronic Stress**—Long-term stress that is often ignored. This can stem from ongoing job pressures, family issues, or financial struggles. If left unmanaged, chronic stress can negatively affect physical health.

If you are experiencing chronic stress and it goes unmanaged, it can lead to a variety of health challenges, causing changes in mood, emotions, appetite, energy levels, and interests. It may also lead to difficulties with concentration, decision making, and sleep. You might experience physical symptoms such as headaches, body aches, and stomach issues, and if you have existing chronic health problems, it is possible that these may worsen.



### Want to know if stress is impacting your life?

Take the Stress Screener offered through Mental Health America to learn more about your stress level and receive information and recommendations on how to make positive improvements.

Additionally, ongoing stress can contribute to increased mental health concerns as well as higher chance of substance misuse or abuse.

Self-care is a stress management strategy that can help combat the negative signs and symptoms of stress. Practicing self-care involves prioritizing both your physical and mental well-being. This can include eating nutritious foods, getting enough sleep, maintaining supportive relationships, engaging in mindfulness and relaxation activities, and practicing positivity. These healthy habits can help you reduce and manage stress effectively.

One specific self-care method that can bring daily joy to your life, reinforce positivity, and keep stress at bay is laughing! Not only is April National Stress Awareness Month, but it's also National Humor Month—A good, hearty laugh can bring immediate and longer-term stress relieving benefits your way!

### Stress-Relieving Benefits of Laughter:

- **Relaxation:** Laughing relaxes your entire body, with muscles experiencing relaxation benefits that can last up to 45 minutes after the laughter subsides.
- **Increased Endorphin Levels:** Laughter boosts endorphin levels, reducing stress and improving mood. This increase can also temporarily aid in pain relief.
- **Heart Health Protection:** Laughing increases blood flow and improves blood vessel function, which can help protect against heart attacks and other cardiovascular issues.
- **Improved Mental Well-Being:** The effects of laughter extend beyond the humorous moment, helping to maintain a positive outlook and strengthening resiliency.

### Ways You Can Bring More Laughter Into Your Life:

- **Practice gratitude.** The act of practicing gratitude, whether it is through a journal, affirmations, or positive self-talk, will distance you from negative thoughts, creating more space for positivity in your life. When you are in a positive space, laughter is more easily welcomed into your life. If you are interested in practicing gratitude more intentionally, consider starting or ending your day by reciting three to five things you are grateful for.
- **Smile often.** Smiling is the first step toward laughter. Not only is it a mood booster, but it's also contagious. A smile can make you more approachable, encouraging conversation and connection, which in turn makes it easier for joy and laughter to follow. To be more intentional about smiling, try putting your devices away when walking between meetings or while running errands. This helps you stay more present and engaged when interacting with others.
- **Bring humor into conversations.** When appropriate, playful and lighthearted communication can foster positive feelings, build emotional connections, and strengthen relationships. Humor and laughter can prevent defensiveness, allow for more spontaneity, and offer opportunities for expressing honest feelings. Not only does this reinforce positivity, but it acts as a defense against stress. Consider asking friends, family members, or co-workers "What's the funniest thing that you've heard this week?" to get the conversation started.
- **Make time for fun activities that you enjoy.** Participating in activities that bring you joy creates more opportunities for you to experience laughter. Embrace this as a chance to lighten things up by finding your inner child, maintaining a silly and playful energy, and even laughing at yourself while having fun doing the things you enjoy. For an extra dose of fun, try something new such as "laughter yoga" for a humorous experience.



### Looking for ways to bring more humor into your conversations?

Try telling a joke like this. "What did one stranger say to the other?... Nothing. They didn't know each other."

Although strategies like focusing on self-care, increasing positivity, and laughing more can help with stress management, it is important to know when to seek professional help. If you find that you are struggling to cope or the symptoms of stress will not go away, it may be time to consider additional support. Refer to resources like employee assistance programs (EAPs) or other benefits that might be available to you.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in a crisis, call or text 988 or visit [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

### Resources

- [Mental Health Resources \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/)
- [Relaxation Techniques \(nccih.nih.gov\)](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/relaxation-techniques/)
- [What is Stress? \(stress.org\)](https://www.stress.org/)

### Sources

- <https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/wellbeing/laughter-is-the-best-medicine>
- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10249641/>

