

Managing Life with Laughter

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**I begin with the modest
assumption that most people
in the U.S. experience chronic,
pervasive stress....**



APA Stress in America 2022

- Stress levels in the U.S. have continued to rise since the COVID pandemic; 27% of all adults in the U.S. said that most days they are so stressed that they can't function, with 46% of adults under the age of 35 said that they are so stressed that they can't function!
- Around a third of adults (34%) reported that stress is completely overwhelming most days. Adults ages 18-34 and 35-44 were more likely than their older counterparts to report feeling this way, with 62% of women feeling this way, but only 51% of men.
- Three-quarters of adults (76%) said they have experienced health impacts due to stress in the prior month, including headache (38%), fatigue (35%), feeling nervous or anxious (34%), and/or feeling depressed or sad (33%).

“We just weren’t built to maintain this level of stress and hypervigilance and hyperarousal for this length of time... we are almost at a breaking point with so many stressors, with many of them out of our control.”

~C. Vaile Wright Ph.D.

APA Senior Director of Healthcare Innovation





**Remember
stress?**



The Stress Response

The stress response is also known as the “fight or flight” (or freeze) response (Selye, 1963), and it happens in all animals with a nervous system...including humans!



During the stress response your body becomes primed for a massive expenditure of energy! Your cardiovascular system, nervous system, and endocrine system are all primed to help keep you alive...you are supposed to move!

You experience the **EXACT SAME** stress response by simply being late for work, forgetting a deadline, arguing with a colleague or by getting yelled at by your boss...to your body it's all the same!





**Stress is like a
Big Mac...**



Stress has become a status symbol!

- The U.S. obsession with overworking is about prestige — the less time you have, the more important we think you are (Coulehan, 2017)
- Researchers from Harvard University, Georgetown University and Columbia Business School presented research participants with two fictional scenarios. The first scenario presented a hypothetical man called Jeff who “works long hours and his calendar is always full.” The second scenario presented another version of Jeff, this time he “does not work and has a leisurely lifestyle.” The first scenario seems realistic, whereas the second seems like a lovely daydream.
- According to the report published in Harvard Business Review, the busy person was perceived by participants to have higher status than the one with free time.

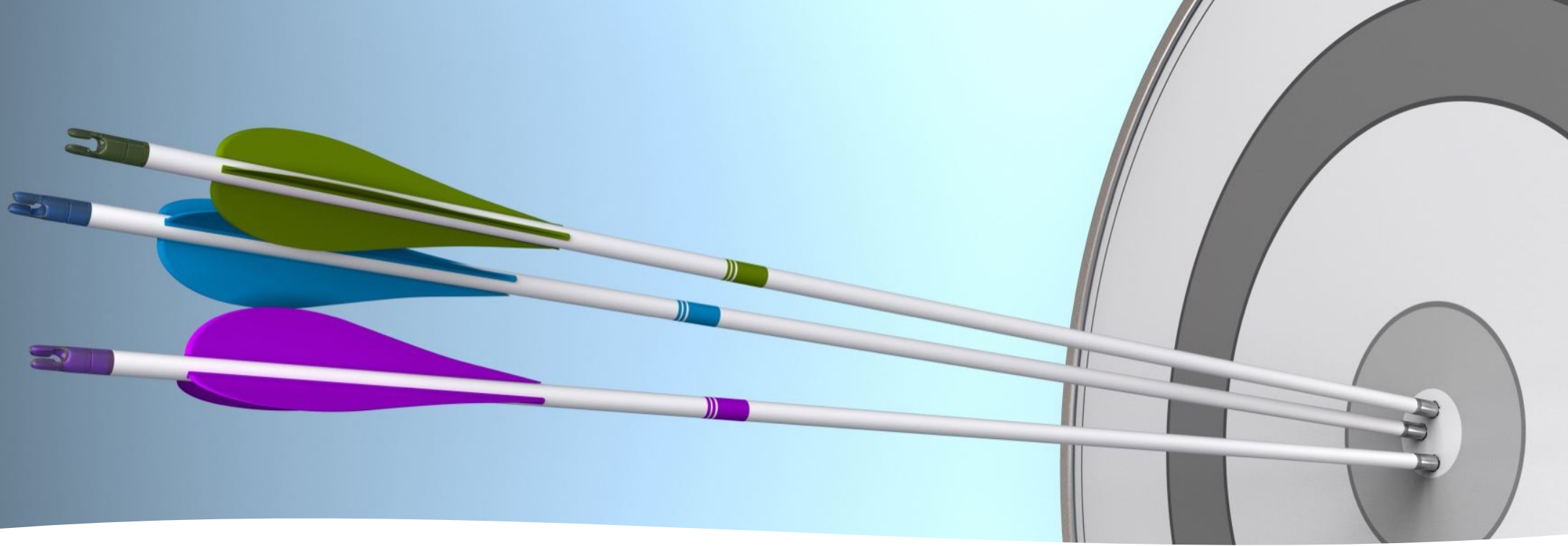


Busy-ness is Killing Us!

- “‘Crazy-busy’ is a great armor, it’s a great way for numbing. What a lot of us do is that we stay so busy, and so out in front of our life, that the truth of how we’re feeling and what we really need can’t catch up with us.” (Brown, 2012)
- “When our self-worth is based on constant “doing” and proximity to chaos, many other vital aspects of our lives begin to suffer. True focused productivity, which allows us to complete and finish projects successfully, is often replaced with multitasking. Quality downtime with loved ones is often reprioritized or compromised. Self-care and rest, which are vital components to our personal sustainability, are often neglected entirely.” (Birch, 2016).
- Ongoing exposure to stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline will cause your body to break down and, if left unchecked, can lead to burnout, life-threatening illnesses, and even premature death.

If you choose to ignore stress and mental health, it will eventually force you to pay attention to it!





Learning to Manage Stress is a Skill

- We live in a culture that teaches us to be stressed, busy, and overwhelmed...we don't need to practice this because we see and feel it every day.
- Most of us have not been taught skills to manage our stress, and most kids are not learning these skills at home or in their communities.

So, how do some people manage stress so well?



The Relaxation Response

Two basic steps:

1) The repetition of a word, sound, thought, phrase, or muscular activity.

2) The passive return to the repetition when other thoughts intrude.



This exercise breaks the train of everyday thought (conscious & unconscious) and allows the body to shut off its stress response mechanisms.

What happens during the Relaxation Response?

- Heart rate decreases
- Blood pressure decreases
- Respiratory rate decreases
- Oxygen consumption decreases
- Muscle tension decreases
- Slow brain waves increase
- Lowered perception of stress
- Decrease in reactivity



Let's Practice



The other half of stress management is being around people who care about you!

The #1 predictor of psychological resilience is a reliable social support structure / network!



We are herd animals...

- We have a primal need to belong...this makes us feel safe, and it is fundamental to our sense of happiness and wellbeing. People who report greater belonging live longer, happier, healthier, and more productive lives.
- People who report feeling isolated, excluded, and lonely are less happy, report lower subjective wellbeing, struggle with learning, lower immune function, and are less healthy.
- The “Social Buffering Hypothesis”



Social Isolation Research in Rats

Over the past 20 years, researchers have been studying the effects of social isolation on rats. Results from all of these studies demonstrate that rats who are socially isolated tend to:

- Be more neurotic
- Perform more slowly on physical & cognitive tasks
- Perform less accurately on learning tasks
- Have lower life expectancies
- Heal more slowly from injuries
- Are more prone to infections

These same findings are seen in socially isolated humans!



**So, what
about
laughter?**



Why Laughter?

“The arguments in favor of laughter as an intervention are grounded in the virtually universal positive results associated with existing studies of laughter” (Strean, 2009).



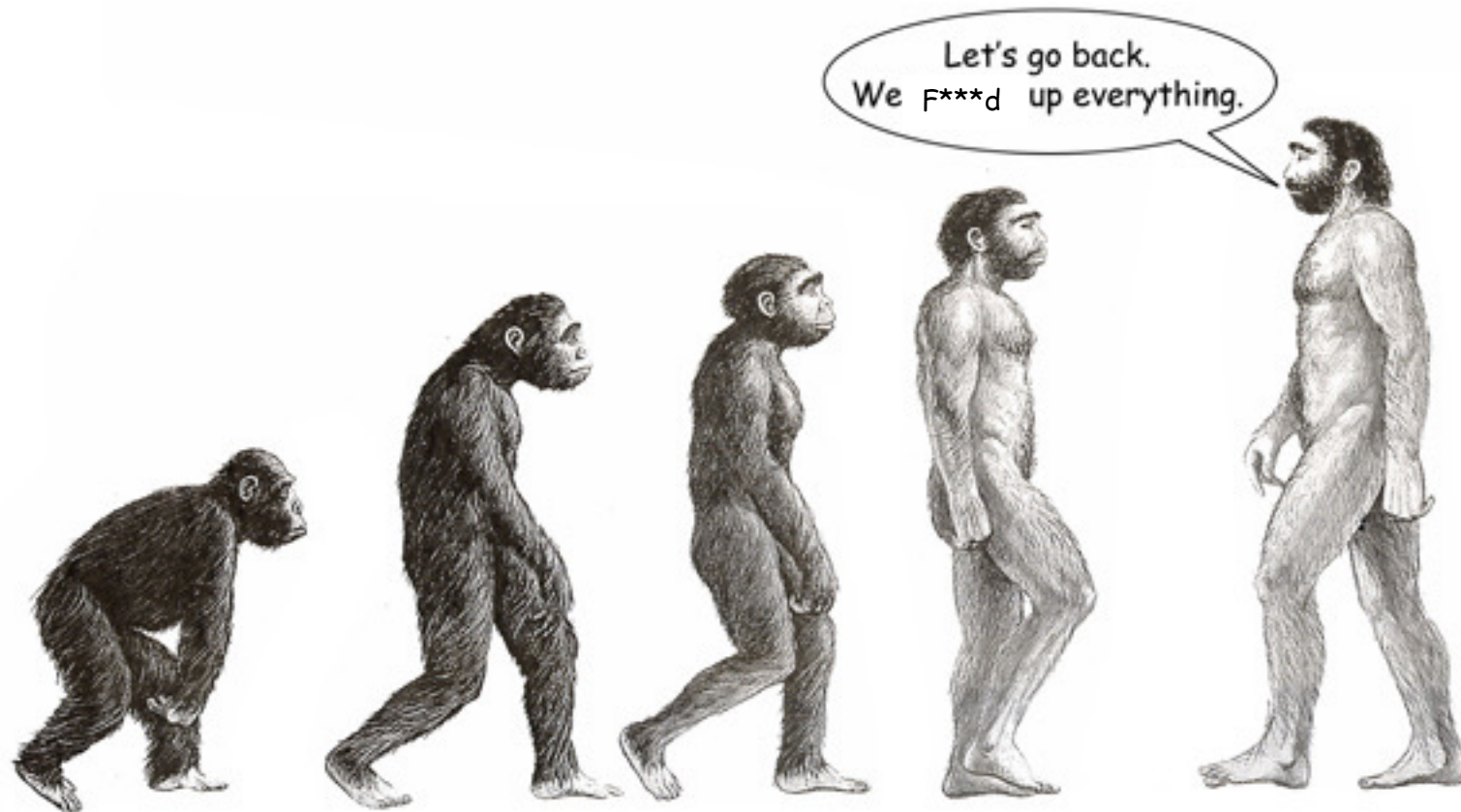
What is Laughter?

It is hypothesized that laughter is an evolved form of playful “chuffing” and signals social acceptance or belonging; laughter may also have been used to communicate relief or that a danger to the social group has passed (Panskepp & Burgdorf, 2003; Simonet, Versteeg, & Storie, 2005; Davila-Ross, Allcock, Thomas, & Bard, 2011).



The Evolutionary Origins of Laughter

- Researchers speculate that laughter may be important on an evolutionary level by helping people cooperate, maintain social bonds, and problem solve as a group (Marijuan & Navarro, 2010).
- "Laughter and singing and smiling tune the group emotionally...They get them on the same wavelength so they can work together more effectively as group" (Seligman quoted in Stein, 2008).



Laughter Physiology

Laughter promotes cardio-vascular health:

- Blood pressure drops and pulse rate drops after you have laughed (Pattillo & Itano, 2001).
- Blood vessels dilate and vessel walls become more “slippery” (Miller, Mangano, Park, Goel, Plotnick, & Vogel, 2005).
- Laughter releases nitric oxide in the endothelial walls of blood vessels which also helps reduce inflammation and makes platelets less “sticky” (Miller & Fry, 2009; Vlachopoulos, Xaplanteris, Alexopoulos, Aznaouridis, Vasiliadou, Baou, Stefanadi, & Stefanadis, 2009).

Extended bouts of laughter (10-15 minutes) have been shown to have the same cardiovascular benefits as 30 minutes of aerobic activity (Godfrey, 2004; Sugawara, Tarumi, Tanaka, 2010)...plus its way more fun!



Laughter Physiology

- Laughter strengthens the immune system!
- Laughter increases lymphatic flow, which boosts the immune system with immediate increases in levels of anti-viral and anti-infection cells.
- Watching a one-hour comedy video has been found to produce:
 - increased number of B cells;
 - increased number of, and activation of, T cells;
 - increased number of Helper T cells (the cells attacked by HIV);
 - increased ratio of Helper/Suppressor T cells;
 - increased number of, and activity of Natural Killer (NK) cells;
 - increased levels of Interferon gamma.

(Berk, Tan, & Fry, 1989; Berk, Felten, & Tan, 2001; Bennett, Zeller, & Rosenberg, 2003)



Laughter Physiology

- Laughter releases endorphins (“feel-good hormones”), self-manufactured natural opiates that create positive states of mind and boost optimism, self-confidence and feelings of self-worth (Azim, Mobbs, & Jo et al., 2005).
- Laughter decreases adrenaline & cortisol secretions (Dillon et al., 1985, Berk et al., 1988).



Laughter Physiology

- Laughter has also been shown to promote attachment and bonding by causing our body to secrete oxytocin (Thompson, Callaghan, Hunt, et al. 2007; Lukas, Toth, Reber, et al. 2011).
- Laughter stimulates feelings of caring and forgiveness (Alexander, 1986; Panskepp, 2000)



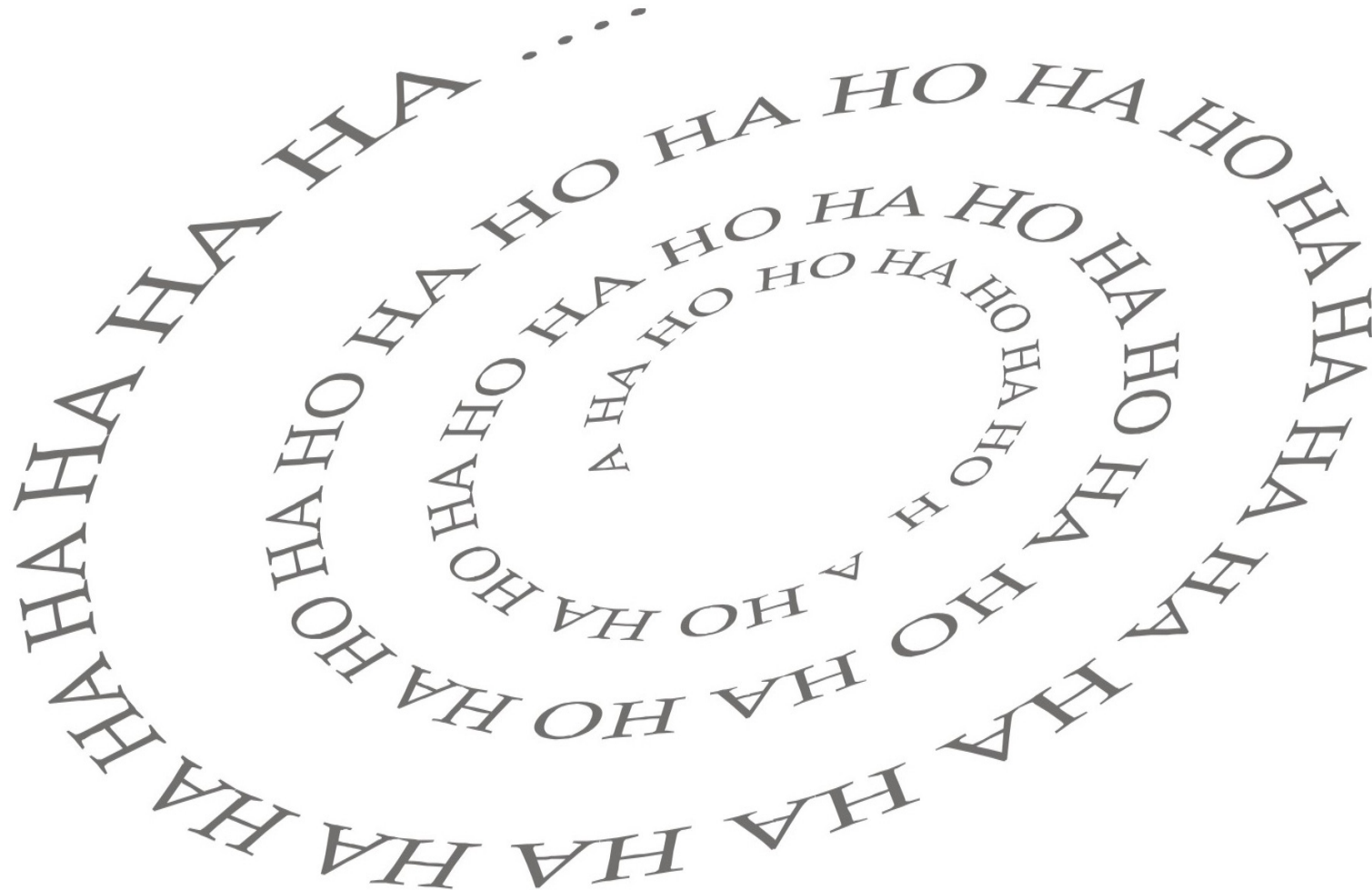
**Laughter switches
on the systems that
stress shuts off!**



In the end...laughter is natural...we can't help but laugh!



Introduction to Laughter Yoga





Simple Laughter Exercises

- Check-in
- Calcutta Clapping
- Laughter Motors
- Fingertip Laughter
- Belly Drum
- Milkshake Laughter
- Lotus Breath
- Aloha Laughter
- To Do List Laughter
- Cell Phone Laughter
- Silent Laughter
- Laughter Meditation





“Dude, suckin' at something
is the first step to being
sorta good at something.”

The body can calm the mind, and the mind can calm the body.... They are inextricably intertwined, and one affects the other!

A healthy mind leads to a healthy body and a healthy body leads to a healthy mind.

But don't forget people! We need to connect with people, and laughter is one of the easiest and most natural ways to do that.

Thank You!

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