

On Humor and Health

So, a coronavirus walks into a bar...

And says to the bartender, "I'll have a shot." The bartender replies, "Great! You can register at www.cookcountycovid19.org/!"

But seriously folks, should we be laughing when all around us is hardship, when so many people have lost so much, and when hope can seem in short supply?

The short answer is "Yes!" Here's why:

We are still in the midst of a very serious situation: So that we can minimize infection risks, we must be serious about how we run mundane errands and have casual conversations. So that we can be well-informed and make good decisions, we must be serious about vetting information sources. So that we don't contribute to the spread of an [infodemic](#), we must be serious about how we then share that information. But being serious about protecting our health and the health of others doesn't mean we shouldn't look for things to laugh about. In fact, a robust response to serious situations often includes a generous dose of humor.

Control

When it feels like the rug has been jerked out from under us, humor helps us find the places where we still have [control](#). Laughter can help discharge anger and anxiety, leaving us more emotionally balanced. We're then able to better control our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors - to better "self-regulate." Additionally, when we shine a light on the ridiculous aspects of a situation, we're no longer completely at the mercy of that situation. Making jokes about what's happening in our lives can remind us that we still have the power to shape our experiences.

My sweetheart purchased a world map and then gave me a dart and said, "Throw this and wherever it lands—that's where I'm taking you when this pandemic ends."

Turns out, we'll be spending two weeks behind the fridge.



Photo by [Caleb Woods](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Connection

Because most things are funniest when they're shared, laughter can create [connection](#). We're reaching out and examining a shared experience. We find places of similarity and are strengthened by these links. We're reminded that even when times are scary, we're not alone.

When I was on a walk this morning, I saw my neighbor talking to her cat. It was obvious that she thought her cat understood her. I came home and told my dog. We laughed a lot.

Health

There's a reason it feels so pleasant to laugh—it's doing our bodies good! When we [laugh](#), we increase our heart rates and breathe more deeply, thus pumping more oxygen to our hearts, brains, and muscles. This "[mini-workout](#)" results in lowered blood pressure, heart rate, and muscle tension. Over time, plenty of laughter can bolster our immune system, relieve pain, and improve our mood.

If you bought 144 rolls of toilet paper in preparation for a 14-day quarantine, you probably should have been seeing a doctor long before coronavirus.

Hurting instead of Healing

Not all laughter heals. The childhood lesson about laughing *with* someone instead of *at* someone always holds true. If a joke is meant to degrade, manipulate, inflict pain upon someone (even if that someone is yourself), is it really just a joke anymore? There's a fine line between appreciating dark or edgy humor and using that as a camouflage for being cruel to yourself or others.

If you're having difficulty finding anything to laugh about, or if the things that you're laughing at cause hurt, connect with the Medical or Behavioral Health Teams at Sawtooth Mountain Clinic. They can help you find ways to add humor back to your "Remedies for Hard Times" medicine chest.

I could tell you a coronavirus joke now, but then you'd have to wait two weeks to see if you got it.

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We're here to help!
Ask a nurse or provider if you'd like to talk. 218-387-2330

4 Humor Styles & Health



(Pssst....before you read any further, you might want to pop over to humorstyles.com and discover YOUR style!)

Even if we can't readily identify the specifics, most people instinctively know that we all have different senses of humor, find different things funny, and use humor in different ways.

There are 4 "humor styles", and they impact not only our experience of humor but also our [mental health](#).

- ☺ **Affiliative Humor**—likes to share laughter with others, tell jokes, make others laugh, uses humor to smooth relationships, wants to put others at ease.
- ☺ **Self-Enhancing Humor**—keeps a humorous outlook even when alone, uses humor to cope with stress and as a way to cheer oneself up
- ☺ **Aggressive Humor**—uses humor to insult or manipulate others, uses ridicule, offensive, sexist, racist, or other purposefully hurt jokes.

- ☺ **Self-Defeating Humor**—amuses others at personal expense, self-disparaging, joins in with others when being ridiculed; uses humor to hide true feelings.

Humor that is affiliative and self-enhancing seems to be protective of good mental health and is correlated with feelings of optimism. People that use self-enhancing humor can "find the funny," are more adept at cheering themselves up, and tend to have less depression, loneliness, and better relationships with other people.

On the flip side, aggressive and self-defeating humor are risk factors for anxiety and depression. Self-defeating humor is also associated with feelings of loneliness and feelings of not mattering to other people.

Our humor style may be both an indicator of our mental health and offer a road map to improvement. Simply knowing about the four humor styles and being able to identify which ones we're engaging in allows us to begin to intentionally choose between them.

"Laughter and tears are both responses to frustration and exhaustion. I myself prefer to laugh, since there is less cleaning up to do afterward." - Kurt Vonnegut

Finding the Funny!

It seems that laughing may be as important for good health as eating our veggies, getting enough sleep, and staying active. If we're running low on laughs, [how do we fill up?](#)

- ☺ **Go hunting for humor!** You know better than anyone what makes you laugh. Plan time for fun, and then seek it out. Re-watch favorite movies or TV shows and discover new ones. Search for stand-up comedy on your favorite streaming service. Pour over [comedy podcasts](#). Comb through the humor section at the library.
- ☺ **Not finding what tickles your funny bone?** Get some help from the internet! In your favorite search engine, type "Suggestions for funny _____" then fill in the blank for what you want. Want to make sure what you find is appropriate for all ages? Include the words "clean" or "family-friendly" in your search.
- ☺ **Study funniness.** The more you know about funniness the easier it will get for you to spot it and to create it for yourself. There are [books](#) that can help you dive into the sausage-making of comedy, and [podcasts](#) that

let you listen in as people share their perspectives on living a life that's focused on funny.

- ☺ **Sometimes, our lives feel like we're living in:** a) reruns of a documentary about boredom, b) an after-school special about the dangers of ????, c) a reality/survival show, and we're about to get kicked off the island. What if we decided to pretend we live in a comedy, started looking out for the funny things that happen every day—and then rolled with them! (If that means using sticky-note reminders - "What's funny about this?" - so be it!)
- ☺ **What if nothing funny ever happens for us to notice?** That may be a sign that you need more potential material from additional sources. Increase your contact with other people as much as you safely can. Keep your eyes and ears open for the crack-ups and silly situations! Animals can be a kick. Spend some time interacting with or watching them. There's a reason that funny pet videos are a thing! Then, when you find the funny, share it with other people that will appreciate it, and enjoy together.

"If you can laugh at it, you can live with it." - Erma Bombeck