



Humor, Laughter, and Aging

“He who laughs, lasts.” —Anonymous

Introduction

Why should senior adults be concerned about humor?

Humor and the subsequent laughter have many therapeutic effects on the body. Most of us don't take humor seriously enough. We need to learn to use it effectively and make it part of our life.



What is Humor?

Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process.” E. B. White

Humor (also spelled humour) is the ability or quality of people, objects, or situations to evoke feelings of amusement in other people.

A sense of humor is the ability to experience humor, a quality which all people share, although the extent to which an individual will personally find something humorous depends on a host of absolute and relative variables, including geographics, culture, maturity, level of education, and context.



What is Humour?

For example, young children (of any background) particularly favor slapstick, whereas senior adults or other mature audiences appreciate satire which relies more on understanding the target of the humor.



What is Laughter?

“Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face.” Victor Hugo

The study of humor and laughter, and its psychological and physiological effects on the human body is called **gelotology**.

Laughter is the physiological response to humor. Laughter is a form of outward expression of amusement, mirth and at times, other emotions.

Strong laughter can sometimes bring an onset of tears or even moderate muscular pain as a physical response to the act.



What is Laughter?

Laughter is a part of human behavior regulated by the **brain**. It helps humans clarify their intentions in social interaction and provides an emotional context to conversations.

Laughter is sometimes seemingly contagious, and the laughter of one person can itself provoke laughter from others. This may account in part for the popularity of laugh tracks in situation comedy television shows.



What is Laughter?

Under certain conditions, our bodies perform laughter or a rhythmic, vocalized, expiratory and involuntary action. Fifteen facial muscles contract and stimulation of the zygomatic major muscle (the main lifting mechanism of your upper lip) occurs.

In extreme circumstances, the tear ducts are activated, so that while the mouth is opening and closing and the struggle for oxygen intake continues, the face becomes moist and often red (or purple).



Humor Differences with Age

“By the time a child reaches nursery school, he or she will laugh about 300 times a day. Adults laugh an average of 17 times a day.” Discovery Health—Science of Laughter

Infants and children are constantly discovering the world around them. What's funny to a toddler consists of short and simple concepts, like a knock, knock joke.

Along with the ridiculous and the surprising, children also appreciate jokes often referred to as "toilet humor."



Humor Differences with Age

Lots of adolescents and teens laugh at jokes that focus on sex, food, authority figures and any subject that has been banned by authority figures in their lives.

It is an insecure time of life and young people often use humor as a tool to protect themselves or to feel superior.



Humor Differences with Age

By the time individuals reach adulthood, they have experienced much of life, including tragedy and success. In keeping with these experiences, senses of humor are more mature.

The things seniors find funny as a result of age or developmental stage seem to be related to the stressors experienced during this time.



Benefits of Humor

There are many benefits to laughter: **physical, mental, and social.**



Physical Benefits

Laughter can be a great workout for your diaphragm, abdominal, respiratory, facial, leg, and back muscles.

It massages abdominal organs, tones intestinal functioning, and strengthens the muscles that hold the abdominal organs in place. Not only does laughter give your midsection a workout, it can benefit digestion and absorption functioning as well.



Mental Benefits

Humor improves brain function and relieves stress. Laughter stimulates both sides of the brain to enhance learning.

Humor is a powerful emotional medicine that not only lowers stress, but also helps dissolve anger and unite families in troubled times.



Social Benefits

Our work, marriage and family all need humor, celebrations, play and ritual as much as record-keeping and problem-solving. We should ask the questions *"Do we laugh together?"* as well as *"Can we get through this hardship together?"*

Our families, our friends and our neighbors are not perfect and neither are our marriages, our kids or our in-laws. When we laugh together, it can bind us closer together instead of pulling us apart.

