

Leach

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June 2007 Newsletter:

Humor Therapy for Father's Day!

Dear Patients and Friends:

Ok some of you are already thinking, he's writing about "Father's Day" but didn't mention a word about "Mother's Day" last month! Gotcha covered on that one, because in this case we're writing about something that dads may need even more than moms: humor therapy.

While in no way can I be certain whether moms or dads are under more stress in our society, stress that—if you've been reading our newsletters (*see* December 2006 Newsletter)—can literally promote everything from coronary disease to arthritis, I am fairly certain us guys have a harder time verbalizing and perhaps "coping" with the stress we are under.

Some of you have followed Dr. James Dobson's writings and prior research he cites to the effect women typically speak 30-40,000 words in a day, while men tap out at 10,000. Others may remember the research that came out a few years back suggesting that at an annual exam women offer up two questions for their doctor, while men average asking no questions! And at least in our culture here in the U.S., few would disagree with the observation that women typically talk more than men☺

The sharing of your problems with a significant other that will offer encouragement and support is a key way to help us cope with stress. So when us dads fail to do that, there are other legitimate ways we can use to combat the effects of stress, and there is growing scientific evidence that—believe it or not—humor therapy may be one of those tools.

How many times have we seen humor diffuse an otherwise bad situation? We can be on the verge of blowing our lid over some stressful event, only to see humor in it and instead break up in laughter.

So is there evidence for health benefits of humor and humor therapy?

Yes! For example, research indicates that even watching one hour of a humor video causes a boost in our immunity to disease that lasts at least 12 hours. Cytotoxic B and T cells, Natural Killer cells, and other important changes in immunity were increased even 12 hours after watching a humor video in human volunteers.

Other studies suggest improved pain tolerance and decreased stress responses are observed after humor therapy. Indeed, humor is considered eustress, or "good" stress on the body, as opposed to "distress".

And remember too the findings of the Harvard Study on Adult Development as reported by Harvard Psychiatrist George Vaillant (*see* December 2006 Newsletter), that found that effective coping was one of the six predictors of good health and life to age 75.

Humor, especially when stressors are present that cannot be controlled or ameliorated, has long been thought an important aid to successful coping for stress.

For example, if you can't make the rent payment a good way to cope with that stress would be to find a cheaper place to live, get a better job, get a better education so you can get a better job, or even all of the above. In that scenario the use of humor would be a good way to help you deal with the stress *until* you can get that better job. However, use of humor *without* trying to work through your rent problems *would not* be a good coping choice.

On the other hand, there are circumstances and situations like the chronic illness of a loved one, or the commitment of a mother to raise her children even if it means delaying her return to school, whereby even chronic stress can be alleviated by the use of humor and represents a good coping behavior.

Finally, remember that exercise is your "daily adjustment," critical for optimal treatment benefit, and has been proven to boost immunity and may have some of the same stress relieving benefits as seen with humor. So get your adjustments, do your exercise, and please tell or share a laugh, or two, or more with someone you love today ☺ That way both of you can live longer and happier!

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert A. Leach

For More Resources on this subject:

- For information on the the role of humor in boosting natural immunity to disease: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?Db=pubmed&Cmd=ShowDetailView&TermToSearch=11253418&ordinalpos=2&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum
- For a review of research and call for further research on humor therapy: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?Db=pubmed&Cmd=ShowDetailView&TermToSearch=15068163&ordinalpos=1&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum

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