

Abstract

Can humor help people with stress related health issues? Nutrition, psychology, and biology are all disciplines that can help answer this question. The saying goes, “Laughter is the best medicine.” Humor has helped people lose weight because when a person is stressed, humor can take place of that stress. The health issue that will be explained in great depth is stress. The main kind of stress that I will be discussing is stress induced eating. This paper will bring all the disciplines together leading to an answer as to whether or not humor can help people lose the weight caused by stress.

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Humor and Health

The topic that I have chosen for this assignment is humor and health. Can humor help people with stress related health problems lose weight? That is the question that, through the research I conducted will be answered. According to Roma Safranek and Thomas Schill, “humor is a significant factor in helping one cope with stress” (amsciepub.com). There were three disciplines that I studied to help find an answer as to whether or not humor can help people lose that weight that is caused by stress. Those three disciplines that I studied were Biology, Psychology, and Health/Nutrition. This paper takes an in depth analysis of those three disciplines to help answer the question that I formed as the topic of this paper.

The weight that is caused by over eating when a person is stressed is called stress-induced eating. According to a study that was done by the Harvard Medical School, the researchers found that one fourth of Americans rated their stress level to be at about an eight when they were asked to rate it out of 10. There are other feelings that a person can experience while stressed; they can feel anxiety and nervousness. All of the feelings that can trace back to stress are negative emotions. When a person is stressed and experiencing negative emotions, they tend to turn to food because they find it comforting. One of the so called comfort foods that a large number of people turn to while stressed is chocolate, which contains a large amount of sugar. The type of food that most people turn to is junk food, which we all know is not the best

for you. People tend to eat more junk food because when they are stressed, a certain hormone called cortisol is released from the body, pushing them towards those high fat, sugary foods that cause us to gain that extra weight. Stress induced eating falls under the category of emotional eating. Even though some people think that the food they consume while stressed will help them forget about their problems, it does not. Consuming of the food that is done while stressed is known as a “coping mechanism”. Even though most believe in the “coping mechanism”, it is temporary and not a healthy decision, unless the food that a person consumes is on the healthier side.

Most individuals that are overweight do blame stress for the extra weight they are gaining, and according to an article in PMC, that was found to be true. Emotional eating is found to a part of most of the overweight population. A study that was done by Jacob S. Walfish, a gastroenterologist showed us that out of the 178 people that were studied before surgery, 40% agreed that their weight gain was caused by some emotion, such as stress.

Biology was the first discipline that I looked into for help in finding an answer that relates humor and health. When a person finds something humorous, it tends to relax the brain. After the brain becomes more relaxed, chemicals are then released from the brain. Those chemicals that are released from the brain are known as neurotransmitters. A neurotransmitter known as endorphin is released from the brain. Endorphin is known as a feel good chemical and will relieve the stress that is built up inside of a person. The more endorphin that is released from the brain, the less stress a person will have. The left and right sides of the brain function differently and we interpret information better depending on the type of information that we are trying to interpret. When it comes to the left and right side of the brain and humor, we interpret jokes within the left side of the brain. The left side of the brain is what a person uses to interpret

unexpected information, such as jokes and helps a person make sense of that information, hoping to come up with a resolution. After the joke is told and processed, emotions are then triggered.

Psychology was another discipline that I looked into because when a person becomes stressed, they tend to think that they are hungry, when they are not. There was a study done that found many people believe humor can help a person heal. This is known as the “magical pill”. There is no such thing as the “magical pill” because it has not been invented yet. It was given the name “magical pill” because no matter what a person is affected with, it was thought that humor can help a person heal. Whether a person had heart disease or cancer, many believed that humor could help them heal. If a person is to enjoy something, one would believe that it is good for you. When research was conducted to find out whether or not this was true, it was found that this is not necessarily true. According to psychologytoday.com, humor and laughter help reduce stress, but only temporarily. In studies that have been done, humor has been known to have many positive physiologic effects, which is one of the ways that help people cope with stress.

Nutrition and health play a major role when it comes to stress and weight gain. Those people that are stressed tend to turn to junk food to snack on. The junk food that is being consumed is filled with high fat and quite a bit of sugar. This is one way that causes a person to gain weight while stressed because of those high amounts of fat and sugar found in junk food. It has been known that humor can be used as a food substitute. According to psychologytoday.com, humor is a mild workout. When a person laughs, the muscles that are used to make us laugh are harder to use than others. This shows an excellent way that laughing can burn calories. The articles states that 10-15 minutes of laughter can burn up to 50 calories.

The conclusion that I have come up with after researching the relationship between humor and stress, is that humor can help a person lose weight while forgetting about hunger,

even though some effects are temporary. The three disciplines that were studied for the topic of my paper were biology, psychology, and nutrition/health. Each of the three disciplines have their own way of relating to humor and how it can help a person while he/she is stressed. When it comes to discipline of biology, we interpret humorous information through the brain. Endorphin is released throughout the brain when a person finds something funny, causing a person to become in a more relaxed state. Psychology also involves the brain and how we think humor helps us lose weight while stressed. Many believe that humor can help us heal through what is known as the “magical pill”. The last discipline, nutrition/health, is known as a “mild workout” (psychologytoday.com). It has been found that 10-15 minutes of later can burn up to 50 calories. The first two disciplines, biology and psychology have shown that humor can help reduce stress, but is only temporary. The temporary effects are a release from muscle tension and can increase a person’s heart and blood pressure. Nutrition/health can help reduce stress and be a key component in weight loss. It can burn calories, but can also depend on the type of food that is consumed while a person is stressed. Those that turn to junk food will only experience those temporary effects, but if more laughter is being done, the more calories a person will burn off. A person should also be aware of the type of food he/she is consuming because it will have a lasting effect, staying healthier and more stress free.

Whether it be a person’s personal, professional or public life, stress can be found in many situations dealing with each of these. Work and school are two very good examples when it comes to stress. In the six years that I have been at Park University, I cannot tell you how many times I have heard students talk about pulling all nighters and what helped them through those nights of no sleep. Energy drinks, which we all know is not the best for us, is what helped those students stay awake. One student consumed so many energy drinks while studying for finals that

he/she had to be taken to the hospital. Stress is not worth the amount of negative effects it can bring to a person. If a person takes the three disciplines into consideration and the ways that humor can help them relax, their personal, professional, and public lives can become more stress free.

According to the American Psychological Association, American Institute of Stress, there are many things that cause individuals to become stressed. The top causes of stress in the United States are jobs, money, health, relationships, lack of sleep, and one of the main ideas discussed in the paper, poor nutrition. Within each of the top causes, there are a number of things that can be the result of an individual being stressed. All of the causes listed are a part of everyone's lives (personal, professional, and public). The physical symptom that a person claims to have when they are stressed was a change in appetite. A change in appetite could be the kind of food in which a person consumes. As stated earlier, a stressed person tends to turn towards their preferred "comfort food". A study that was done by the American Psychological Association in early July of this year, 23% said that they had a change in appetite.

The saying goes, "laughter is the best medicine". Whether laughter is short term or long term, it can help relieve stress that can build up inside individuals. Do not let stress become a part of your everyday life. Next time you take part in a humorous situation, take a few seconds to see and feel how it affects you. Let the brain relax and take the "magical pill" (psychologytoday.com). Also, next time you reach for your preferred "comfort food", remember, healthier foods can help keep that stress-induced weight away.

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