Best Medicine

In a post titled "Laughing at My Status," POZ blogger and long-term survivor Aundaray Guess shares how humor helps him live with HIV and argues that laughter can help you too. Below is an edited excerpt.

January 8, 2018 By Aundaray Guess

I was once asked to help friends move into a new apartment. I'm not a big fan of lifting boxes, so when I was asked, I told them, "I wish I could, but my HIV is acting up."

All had a good laugh, knowing it was my cue that I was not interested. We found humor in the exchange. They say that laughter is the best medicine, and, although having HIV is no joke, incorporating laughter into my life has contributed positively to my health.

Ironically, if someone had told me to simply laugh when I was initially diagnosed, I would not have reacted too favorably. Back then, I believed that I had lost the ability to even smile.

The benefit of being a longtime survivor is that you start to see the humor in not only your HIV status but also life. You learn to stop reacting to the small things and appreciate the big picture.

Most studies agree that laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving resistance to disease.

A good laugh triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.

I'm a big believer in this, as the comedian side of me comes out when I know I'm about to be pricked by a needle for my blood draw or during any other painful episode of my life.

I don't claim not to feel pain, but by finding humor in that moment, my perceived pain levels are reduced and my perception that I can cope increases. Laughter alone isn't the solution, but it can help a person overcome discomfort.

Laughter contributes to my more positive mood. In fact, I seek out those who can make me smile. Being around positive people allows me to get caught up in their good mood because laughter is also contagious.

With the ability to laugh and embrace humor, I've seen my stress levels decrease and my tolerance levels increase. That's a great benefit for me, knowing I once used to walk around with

anger.

In fact, you could say that anger was my new best friend, and it followed me—or rather, I let it lead me. Once I removed the anger, more people came into my life. My anger projected unapproachability.

The introduction of laughter can also boost one's resilience. Resilience is the ability to see failure as a natural progression to success rather than as a negative outcome.

This was important to me as I learned that although I couldn't change my HIV status, I was more of a winner if I didn't let it change me.

And being a miserable person is not who I was meant to be. So with my new resilience, I accepted my faults, instead of asking myself, "Why me? Why did I get HIV?"

I learned to see the positive side of my situation and identified a purpose for my status: to help those living with HIV so they do not allow the virus to define their existence.

So where can people find laughter? Do you buy it at a store or download it as an app? Where can someone begin? If you look around, there are many places to find humor.

Television is the most obvious place, but if we broaden our imagination and look just a little bit deeper, we can find laughter in reading funny books, spending more time with friends who make us laugh and sometimes just finding humor in our day-to-day activities.

Of course, this doesn't mean laughing at people but laughing with them.

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