



The Wellness Wire

Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine

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An initiative of the Faculty Assembly Steering Committee, the Office of Medical Student Support Services, the Fit & Well Committee, the Assistant Dean of Faculty Development, and the Division of Education and Faculty Development in the Department of Humanities, Health, and Society.

Greetings as we all learn to reframe our lives during these unprecedented times. Recognizing that figuring out how to work from home can be challenging, the Faculty Assembly Steering Committee has launched this initiative to provide resources for faculty and staff to foster our collective well-being.

Editor: Greg Schneider, MD

Overcoming Adversity

Reflecting on these last six months since the declaration of a national emergency, it is staggering how much our lives have changed. From our morning coffee to our bedtime ritual, practically every aspect of our lives has been affected in some way, whether because of the new app we must use or the mask we must wear. And many of us are the lucky ones. We haven't lost our jobs or our access to food or our health. (I sometimes wonder if I have lost some of my sanity, but that's another matter.) Whether we consider ourselves lucky or not, I hazard to guess that all of us have faced adversity these last months and are dealing with loss or grief of one kind or another. Grappling with adversity is perhaps the defining aspect of 2020. How we emerge from that adversity will shape our lives in the years to come.

For whatever reason, I have found myself thinking about Buddhism a lot recently. In what have been called the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha, there are the **truth** of suffering, the **truth** of the cause of suffering, the **truth** of the end of suffering, and

the **truth** of the path that leads to the end of suffering. The cause of suffering, it turns out, is our desire, and the challenge of a human life lies in how we handle our desires, especially when frustrated. Although I am not sure how the Buddha would have handled the pandemic, we do have some insight into ways of managing our frustrated desires and other setbacks. In no particular order, I have listed some strategies that contemporary psychologists (and maybe the Buddha) would recommend.

- Surround yourself with positive, supportive, and encouraging people.
- Write, whether it be a journal entry, a poem, or a short story.
- Be in nature.
- Invest in yourself, be it through reading, developing some new talent, or rediscovering an old one.
- Practice self-control.
- Don't let your current beliefs and habits become dogma and let yourself be open to new ideas.
- Come to terms with your anxieties as best you can, trying to examine them head on and get to the root of the worry.
- Practice integrity.
- Get outside your comfort zone.
- Invest in the relationships that give your life meaning.
- Take lessons from your failures and think of ways you can move forward differently next time.

Depending on the tradition, it is disputed whether the Buddha laughed, but I have always been partial to the smiling Buddha myself. It strikes me that a good laugh, a compassionate laugh that acknowledges the joys and sorrows of life, might be the best antidote for adversity of all.

Don't forget about our interactive [Wellness Wall](#).





Resources for Overcoming Adversity

Editor: Suzanne Minor, MD

Laughter may be the best medicine...

Let's explore a few resources around this idea of healing laughter.

The Mayo Clinic offers a patient education handout about [Stress Relief from Laughter](#) detailing the short- and long-term benefits and effects of laughter. Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain. Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress. Laughter may ease pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers. Laughter can also make it easier to cope with difficult situations and helps you connect with other people.

This article entitled [Being an Artisan of Joy: Laughter](#) is short but full of insights. Laughing at oneself and one's own imperfections and not taking oneself too seriously can allow you to befriend your imperfections and to grow. Laughter is the voice of self-compassion and helps you to gain new perspective.

This [University of Michigan webpage](#) offers strategies to laugh more. My favorite recommendation listed here is: Surround yourself with humor: An Internet search for "stupid pet tricks" or "funniest home movies" will give you, as well as the people you care for or the people who care for you, plenty to laugh at.

This article from the Journal of Hospital Medicine entitled [The Healing Power of Laughter](#) offers some specific strategies to bring out our giggles! Some of the ideas sounds promising, although I am not necessarily advocating for blanket adoption of these suggestions. We should not walk around smiling if we are not feeling it; there may be gender or cultural influences on our smiling levels or the situation may not call for smiling. Also, physicians may swallow emotions at times and cover them up with a smile.

There may be, nevertheless, strategies here that you can apply in your life. For instance, have you considered planning silly times? Are there silly words that you can be your belly laugh triggers over the weekend? What are your silly words? How can you be a good sport today? How can you celebrate success and fun in your day today?

