

# Road to **WELLfluent**<sup>TM</sup>

Embrace better health

## WORKING OUT TO RELIEVE STRESS



Stress Awareness Month is observed with the intention of increasing knowledge about the impact of stress in our lives. During the month of April, Stress Awareness Month is recognized as the time to spread awareness, but also to increase knowledge on how to better manage or prevent it from affecting your physical and mental well-being.

### **Stressed out? You're not alone.**

Everyone experiences stress at one time or another, and stress affects all of us in different ways. But this much is true for everyone: Regular exercise reduces the harmful effects of stress. But let's start with this question:

### **What effect can chronic stress have on your health?**

Stress sets off a chain of events. The body reacts to it by releasing a hormone, adrenaline, that temporarily causes your breathing and heart rate to speed up and your blood pressure to rise. When stress is constant (chronic), your body remains in high gear off and on for days or weeks at a time. Chronic stress can take a physical toll on you. It can weaken your immune system and cause uncomfortable physical symptoms like headache and stomach problems. Stress affects the body in many ways.

### **Can stress lead to anxiety or depression?**

Yes. Stress can affect the body and mind. First instance, you may have physical signs (such as headaches, tense or sore muscles, or trouble sleeping), emotional signs (such as feeling anxious or depressed), or both. Stress can make you feel cranky, forgetful, or out of control. And the mental health implications of stress may be felt acutely by some groups, who are already more at risk for anxiety or depression. Women, for instance, are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression compared to men. And only one in three African Americans who needs mental health treatment receives it. There are lots of reasons to manage stress – especially the emotional and mental health benefits of dealing with stress.

### **Does chronic stress cause high blood pressure or heart disease?**

The link between stress and cardiovascular disease is not clear, but it can lead to unhealthy lifestyle choices that are associated with high blood pressure and heart disease. While the exact causes of high blood pressure are unknown, contributing factors include being overweight, eating too much sodium (salt), lack of physical activity and drinking too much alcohol.

### **How can being more active help?**

Regular physical activity, such as brisk walking, can improve your quality of life and relieve stress, tension, anxiety and depression. You may notice a “feel good” sensation immediately following your workout, and also see an improvement in overall well-being over time as physical activity becomes a regular part of your life.

**Source:** [www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/working-out-to-relieve-stress](http://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/working-out-to-relieve-stress)

# LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

It's true: laughter is strong medicine. It draws people together in ways that trigger healthy physical and emotional changes in the body. Laughter strengthens your immune system, boosts mood, diminishes pain, and protects you from the damaging effects of stress. Nothing works faster or more dependably to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh.

Humor lightens your burdens, inspires hope, connects you to others, and keeps you grounded, focused, and alert. It also helps you release anger and forgive sooner.

With so much power to heal and renew, the ability to laugh easily and frequently is a tremendous resource for surmounting problems, enhancing your relationships, and supporting both physical and emotional health. Best of all, this priceless medicine is fun, free, and easy to use.

As children, we used to laugh hundreds of times a day, but as adults, life tends to be more serious and laughter more infrequent. But by seeking out more opportunities for humor and laughter, you can improve your emotional health, strengthen your relationships, find greater happiness—and even add years to your life.

## Laughter is good for your health

### **Laughter relaxes the whole body.**

A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.

### **Laughter boosts the immune system.**

Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.

Laughter 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.

### **Laughter protects the heart.**

Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.



### **Laughter burns calories.**

Okay, so it's no replacement for going to the gym, but one study found that laughing for 10 to 15 minutes a day can burn approximately 40 calories—which could be enough to lose three or four pounds over the course of a year.

### **Laughter lightens anger's heavy load.**

Nothing diffuses anger and conflict faster than a shared laugh. Looking at the funny side can put problems into perspective and enable you to move on from confrontations without holding onto bitterness or resentment.

### **Laughter may even help you to live longer.**

A study in Norway found that people with a strong sense of humor outlived those who don't laugh as much. The difference was particularly notable for those battling cancer.

Source: [www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine](http://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine)

# APRIL IS NATIONAL FOOT HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH: OUR TIPS FOR HEALTHY FEET!



April is National Foot Health Awareness Month and research shows that approximately 20 percent of Americans experience at least one foot problem each year. These issues can be the result of an underlying health problem such as obesity, diabetes, or peripheral neuropathy.

Today **Dr. Amanda Bartell** and **Dr. Andrew Bartell** of **North Florida Foot & Ankle Center** in Jacksonville, FL, Southside, and Duval County are sharing their tips for happy, healthy feet!

- Examine your feet each day, using a mirror – if needed - to inspect the bottom of your feet for cracks, peeling, injuries or dry skin. This is particularly important if you have diabetes to avoid a non-healing wound.
- Wear shoes in public areas where your feet can be scratched or cut, leading to infection, athlete's foot or plantar warts.
- Replace the shoes you wear to exercise every six months or 500 miles to avoid heel and foot pain when the inside of the shoe begins to lose support.
- Stretch your ankles, lower legs and feet daily and before any activity to avoid injury.
- Thoroughly dry your feet and between your toes after bathing to reduce the risk of fungal infections. Follow up by applying a good moisturizer.
- Don't leave polish on nails all the time as it can lead to fungal toenails.
- Apply sunscreen on ankles and between toes to avoid sunburn and guard against skin cancer.
- There is a good chance you will not wear the same size in shoes your entire life, so have them measured on a regular basis.
- Maintain a healthy weight because extra weight puts pressure on the feet, often causing heel or foot pain, circulatory problems, arthritis, and stress fractures.
- Try to wear shoes with good support and a low heel and use custom orthotics to provide proper arch support.




If you experience a foot, ankle or toe injury – don't try to treat it yourself - schedule a visit to your podiatrist. The more quickly you seek treatment, the better the outcome will be.

**Source:** [www.nffac.com/blog/april-is-national-foot-health-awareness-month-our-tips-for-healthy-feet](http://www.nffac.com/blog/april-is-national-foot-health-awareness-month-our-tips-for-healthy-feet)

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**Get Started:** Log in to your Member Portal at [AvMed.org/Login](https://AvMed.org/Login) and click Health and Wellness.

<sup>1</sup> \$28 enrollment fee waived for standard gyms only 4/1/23 12:01 a.m. - 6/30/23 11:59 p.m. PT. Monthly fees are subject to applicable taxes.

<sup>2</sup> Add a spouse/domestic partner to a primary membership for additional monthly fees. Spouses/domestic partners must be 18 years or older. Fees may vary based on fitness center selection.

<sup>3</sup> Costs for premium exercise studios exceed \$28/mo. and an enrollment fee will apply for each premium location selected, plus applicable taxes. Fees vary based on premium fitness studios selected.

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