

## Treatment options

All forms of AADS are serious if they affect your ability to function in life the way you would like to. Careful attention to determining the source of inner conflict, strained emotions, and behavioral changes is critical for addressing the development of AADS and highlighting treatment options.

There is no sure way to prevent any disorder. People inherit tendencies toward certain disorders, and if you think AADS runs in your family, you are more likely to be a candidate. However, there are steps you can take to make AADS less likely. The most helpful thing to do is learn the set of skills required for a sense of humor. McGhee (2001) recommends:

- Adjust your attitude. Make it a point to try to be in tune to your reactions in situations and your overall attitude. Try to adjust your attitude by focusing on the positive aspects in a negative situation.
- Try Optimism. Change your thinking to see at least one positive aspect in every situation.
- Sensitize yourself to seeing humor in everyday life. Go to the zoo and watch the animals play or observe silly children's play.
- Use humor in a social setting. Practice telling jokes or funny stories. Try to memorize a humorous poem or short story. Keep in mind appropriate humor that unites people and not humor that makes fun of people or divides people.
- Find humor in the midst of stress and negative feelings. Think about a humorous person and ask yourself what she or he would do in this situation.
- Learn to express your humor; go ahead and chuckle or have a good belly laugh.
- Remember that we are created in God's image and we have the capacity to produce and appreciate humor, and the capability to laugh. Ask God to show you the humor in life.

If these initial steps do not provide relief from the pain of AADS, other options are available. Consider these steps as well:

- Rent funny movies
- Watch humorous TV shows
- Browse humorous websites:  
<http://www.bellylaughter.com/>
- Keep a humor journal and jot down funny things you observe throughout the day
- Keep humorous cartoon clippings with you
- Keep in mind the healthy benefits of a good belly laugh
- Sign up on a webserver that sends you a joke a day: <http://www.digital-laughter.com>

Although AADS is common, you can take steps to prevent it and recover from it. You can find joy, hope, and humor again.

If you are in doubt about where to turn for assistance, please feel free to call the Regent University Psychological Services Center at (757) 352-4488.

## Resources:

McGhee, P. E. (2001). *Health, Humor, and the Amuse system: Humor as survivor training*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company

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Brochure author: Melissa A. Jenkins-Fernandez, M.A.  
Series Editor: La Trelle D. Jackson, Ph.D. &  
Mary Beth Covert, M.A.

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(757) 226-4488

# Help for Acquired Amusement Deficiency Syndrome (AADS)



## Regent University Psychological Services Center

1000 Regent University Drive  
Classroom Building Suite 188  
Virginia Beach, VA

**(757) 352-4488**

Most people are familiar with the notion that laughter is a good medicine. In fact laughter has been referred to as “internal jogging” by Dr. Fry (1986), a physician who has studied the physiological affects of laughter for over 3 decades. Dr. Fry found that the physiological effects of 20 seconds of hearty laughter provides the heart a workout equivalent to three minutes of hard rowing. Once laughter ceases there is a period of relaxation that can last for 45 minutes and one may notice a drop in blood pressure, pulse rate, and muscle tension below normal. Noted author, Norman Cousins attributed his 1:500 chance of recovery from a painful collagen disease to prescriptive bouts of hearty laughter. By forming a partnership with his doctor, taking massive doses of vitamin C, and engaging in hearty belly laughter, he fully recovered from his disease and dedicated his life to teaching others the importance of having humor in their lives.

Obviously, throughout the course of one’s life there are times when it is healthy to take matters seriously and respond to events in a serious manner. However, some people apply this serious demeanor across all situations and at all times. If you feel like you are prone to be serious all of the time or have somehow lost your sense of humor, it is possible that you might be suffering from **AADS**—Acquired Amusement Deficiency Syndrome, according to psychologist Paul McGhee. For a quick screening, take a few seconds and read the cartoon to the right:



If you did not find this amusing, that does not necessarily mean that you have AADS. You might have a great sense of humor, but this cartoon did not suit your humor style. In fact, people’s senses of humor are highly idiosyncratic. What you may think is hilarious another person might think is humorless. However, if you are having difficulty regaining your sense of humor, or are only able to approach life in a humorless fashion, you might consider whether you have AADS.

AADS is not an actual diagnosable disorder, but it is a way of describing a common condition that many people experience after various setbacks and drawbacks in life. Unfortunately, AADS is known to insidiously erode one’s capacity to feel the joyfulness of life. In many instances, people do not realize that they have lost the ability to find humor and joy in life.

### Symptoms

McGhee (2001) maps out the symptoms of AADS in his book “*Health, Healing, and the Amuse System.*” The following are some symptoms of AADS. Review the areas and determine how you compare with the descriptors.

- Persistent seriousness
- Persistent soreness about almost everything
- Difficulty swallowing humor
- Emotional constipation
- Prone to making mountains out of molehills
- Preferred bed time reading is the “*Annual Report*”
- Spending hours on the weekend working to get ahead of competition is your idea of fun
- Cannot remember the last time you had a good belly laugh

If you have several of these symptoms, you may be in need of an attitude adjustment. McGhee reminds us that just like when your spine is misaligned every movement creates discomfort, losing your sense of humor has a similar impact in your outlook. When your demeanor has been misaligned, it is hard to make room for joyous emotions.

### What causes this problem?

Often times when people experience events in life that are sad, painful, disheartening, and shameful the last thing on their mind is humor and laughter. For some people, however, they appear to find the positive side

(e.g., the glass is half empty) or the humor in any situation. Those people appear to laugh themselves out of a bad mood. For others, they are only able to focus on the negative side (e.g., the glass is half full) or the humorlessness in a situation.

It seems that people are “wired” in their genes to respond to these events in either a positive or negative framework, and of course there are some individuals in the middle of these extremes. Because there are many influences that can impact one’s mental health, it is important to monitor one’s lifestyle and health practices. The good news is that if you would like to regain your sense of humor, you can reintroduce humor back in your life. You do not have to be doomed to see the glass as half empty.

### What about Christians?

Everyone feels differently as to what is considered appropriate humor and what is considered inappropriate humor. For example, inappropriate, or maladaptive humor might be laughing at a person’s misfortunes or laughing at someone’s mistakes. Appropriate humor, or adaptive humor is being able to laugh at your own mistakes and laugh **with** people *not* at them. Many people believe that Jesus laughed with people and are comforted by the image of Jesus laughing with children. These are some verses that may bring joy and laughter to your heart as you read them:

- Jesus: “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11 NIV).
- Solomon: “A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22 NIV).
- “Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound” (Psalms 89:15 NIV).

