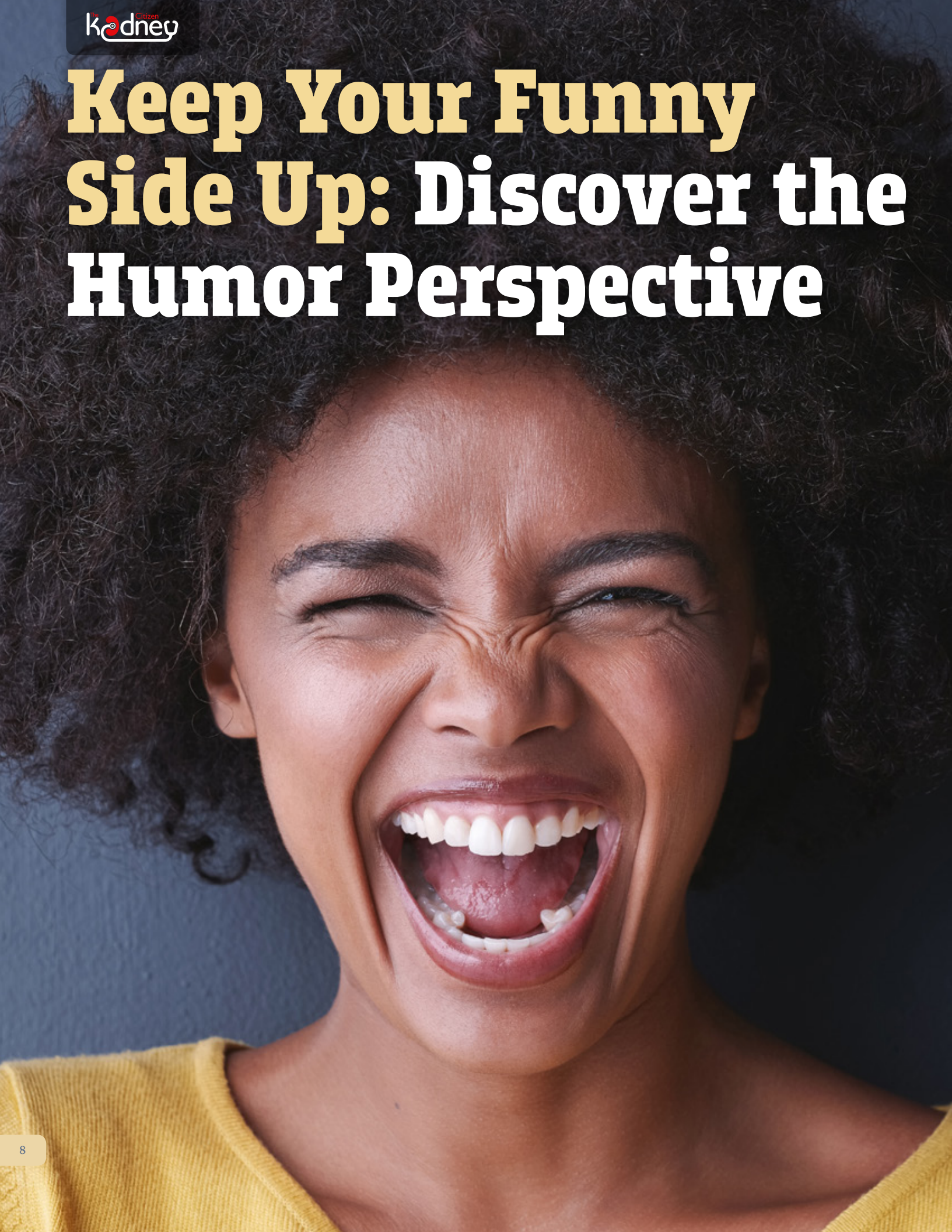


# Keep Your Funny Side Up: Discover the Humor Perspective



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Here's a sobering prediction I came across not too long ago: 52 percent of American executives will die of stress-related illnesses. As a psychologist I know that the emotional tension and stress experienced by those executives will not be caused by the events in their lives. Rather, the stress will be caused by their *perceptions* of those events. It is not *what* is happening to us that hurts; it's *how* we think about what is happening to us.

When you received the diagnosis of chronic kidney disease (CKD), it was a lot to learn about and a lot to take in. Yet, when you attended training to do home dialysis or you received your first in-center dialysis treatment, you probably saw other people with kidney disease laughing and smiling—enjoying their lives. Their perception of living with kidney disease and its treatment helps them to be happy to be alive and to have treatment. You also may have seen people who looked angry that they have kidney disease and have to do dialysis treatments. Their perception may be that life is over, they are worse off than anyone else, and they dread every day. Which perception do you have?

### Good News/Bad News

How would you react if you received notice that the post office was trying to deliver an unexpected certified letter to you? If you thought it was *bad news*, like another hospital bill, you would probably react with anxiety: trembling, butterflies or knots in your stomach, increased heart rate and blood pressure, perspiration; in other words, worry and stress. But imagine the letter says that you have inherited a fortune and all your troubles are over. No anxiety. No knots, no trembling, no skyrocketing blood pressure, no worry, no stress. You might even giggle. It all depends on what you *think* (imagine) is going to happen.

You can't control events, but you can learn to control your thoughts and reactions to events.

Control your reactions (keep anxiety manageable) by remembering that every event or situation has many sides, and the sides are not all equally serious. Develop the habit of looking for the less serious sides. Look at all sides of a situation, and you will eventually come to the side that is absurd, ludicrous, zany, or ironic. Find the laughable side of a situation and you will reduce the emotional tension, which is part of your stress.

Humor is a perspective that provides *psychological distance*. It allows you to step back and take a second (or third) look at things. From that psychological distance, troubles don't seem as large, and you can see more of the resources to help solve the problem. Alan Cohen encourages us, commenting that "laughter lifts us over high ridges and lights up dark valleys in a way that makes life look so much better." What are some ways that you make life better even though you have kidney disease?

### What Are You Laughing At?

You might try your hand at making up fun descriptions as one way of coping with the tougher parts of dialysis. Some people name their dialysis machine (sometimes as their sidekick) or dress it up. And some people put up funny posters in their "home dialysis room" or watch funny movies while doing dialysis. Here are some "funnies:"

"Why is it called baby-sitting when all you do is run after them?"

"How come the windshield wiper always works better on the passenger side?"

And the Los Angeles Times Syndicate poses this metaphorical question, "Do you ever feel that life is a car wash and you're going through it on a bicycle?"

Do you have additional ones you can share? Send them to us at [kniccum@dialysispatients.org](mailto:kniccum@dialysispatients.org).



### My Sense of Humor?

To have a terrific sense of humor, you also need a sensitivity about humor. The best comedians make us laugh because they realize that, with the right perspective, almost everything can be funny. You and I need to be sensitive to the fact that laughter can be completely out of place if the timing is wrong. But, the next time life's little foul ups are getting to me, I'm going to see if I can find the comic's perspective and use my wittiness to outwit the dimwits and the nitwits and...RELAX. Humor—getting a joke or figuring out a riddle—involves problem-solving. It puts your brain in gear to make better decisions. After a few chuckles about the less serious side, I can turn my attention more successfully to serious concerns. You can do it, too!

Tell us about a time when humor and laughter helped you through a tough situation, and we'll share them in a future newsletter! Send to [kniccum@dialysispatients.org](mailto:kniccum@dialysispatients.org).

*Steve Wilson is a psychologist, author, speaker, workshop leader and consultant who helps people and organizations get the absolute most out of themselves while they love every minute of it. He is the Cheerman of The Bored of World Laughter Tour, Inc.*