

The Benefits of Laughter

What makes you laugh? Does a funny joke crack you up? Do you burst out giggling when you're nervous? You know that you laugh because something is funny, but did you know that laughing can be good for your health? There are many researchers and scientists who study laughter and can confirm that the health benefits are real.



Laughter is good for our physical and psychological well-being, but there are still a lot of questions about why humans laugh. It might seem that we laugh to make ourselves feel good, but many researchers say that the main purpose for human laughter is to bring people together. They say that by connecting with each other through laughter, both our physical health and psychological health improve. The health benefits are the positive side effects.

The act of laughing can cause a number of things to happen to our brains and bodies. When we laugh, our brains release endorphins. Endorphins make us better able to handle stressful situations or to feel relaxed in group settings. By sharing laughter with others, we feel that we are part of the group—that we belong.

Depending on how we are laughing, there are some physical changes we go through as well. We make sounds, such as hiccuping or coughing noises. We might even laugh so hard that we cry. Our faces change—we use about 15 of our face muscles when we laugh. Our bodies move, twist, or contort. The larynx might half close, making it hard for us to catch our breath or to speak because air can't get into and out of the body as well as it normally can.

Despite the odd things that happen to our bodies as we laugh, scientific studies have shown that laughter can have many positive effects on health. One of those effects is providing a good workout. Laughter works stomach, facial, leg, and back muscles. Studies show that laughing 100 times has the same effect as being on a rowing machine for 10 minutes or an exercise bike for 15 minutes.

HUMAN LAUGHTER		
Physical Health Benefits	Mental Health Benefits	Social Benefits
Boosts immunity	Adds joy and zest to life	Strengthens relationships
Reduces the effects of stress	Improves memory and learning	Builds confidence
Decreases pain	Relieves stress	Enhances teamwork
Relaxes muscles	Improves mood	Helps defuse conflict
Lowers blood pressure	Enhances resilience	Promotes group bonding

Even if nothing seems funny to you right now, you can create opportunities to laugh in the near future. Try some of these activities, and you'll be laughing in no time:

- Watch a funny movie or TV show.
- Read cartoons or comics.
- Share a good joke or a funny story.
- Check out a book from the humor section at the library.
- Play with a pet.
- Do something silly.
- Plan a fun outing with friends.

Now that you've read about the health benefits of laughter and activities that can make you laugh, you are better prepared to improve your health and the health of those around you with a simple giggle.