

The Physical Effects of Laughing

What happens when you laugh?

Fifteen facial muscles contract and there is electrical stimulation of the zygomatic major (cheek muscle) in particular. The epiglottis half-closes, interrupting respiration so that the intake of air becomes irregular and gasping. These behaviours are usually accompanied by noises that can range from sedate giggles to boisterous guffaws.

Source <http://people.howstuffworks.com/laughter.htm>

Humour and physical health

Research shows that:

- Muscles relax more quickly after watching funny cartoons than after looking at beautiful scenery.
- Laughter reduces some of the hormones associated with the stress response.
- Watching 30–60 minutes of comedy results in beneficial changes to the immune system that are still present 12 hours later.
- Humour has been found to reduce pain in some patients.

Laughter is infectious

Humans have a detector in the brain that is specifically devoted to laughter. It responds to laughter by triggering neural circuits that generate more laughter.

Source: McGhee, 1999

Words that describe laughter

Cackle, chortle, chuckle, crack-up, hee-haw, hoot, giggle, guffaw, snigger, snort, titter.

Humour and Emotional Health

How does laughter assist emotional health?

- Seeing a smile and returning it changes our brain chemistry and gives us a natural high. It gives us more pleasure than eating chocolate, shopping, being given money, or drinking coffee.
- Humour helps people cope more effectively with life stressors.
- Laughing promotes feelings of happiness and joy, and under these conditions it is much easier to think creatively around a problem.
- Humour is an easy way to get in touch with your feelings and control them in difficult situations.
- Laughter brings people together and improves interpersonal relationships.
- Regular laughter puts people in a positive frame of mind and gradually makes them positive thinkers.
- Humour makes it easier to challenge negative thoughts.
- Positive thinking and optimism are linked with better health outcomes.

Your Sense of Humour is one of the most powerful tools you have to ensure that your daily mood and emotional state support good health.

Source: McGhee 1999

