



The beneficial effects of laughter on mental and emotional health are not just intuitions or popular beliefs, but are solidly supported by numerous rigorous scientific studies. Researchers from various disciplines, such as psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience or medicine, have explored the mechanisms of action of laughter and have highlighted its multiple benefits for our psychological well-being.

Among the pioneering studies, we can mention the work of Dr. Lee Berk at Loma Linda University in California. In the 1980s, he showed that laughter significantly increased the number and activity of immune cells in the blood, thus strengthening our natural defenses against infections and diseases. He also observed that laughter decreases cortisol levels, the stress hormone, and increases the production of endorphins, the hormones of well-being, providing a lasting sensation of relaxation and pleasure.

Other researchers, like Dr. Michael Miller of the University of Maryland, have studied the effects of laughter on cardiovascular health. They found that regular laughter improves the endothelial function of the arteries, that is to say their ability to dilate to let the blood pass. Laughter thus acts as a real "vascular gymnastics" that protects our heart and prevents the risks of heart attack or stroke.

In the field of mental health, studies have multiplied to explore the therapeutic applications of laughter. Dr. Rokia Ballo, a psychiatrist at the University of Basel in Switzerland, showed that regular practice of laughter yoga significantly reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression in patients, while improving their quality of life and their sense of social connection. Laughter acts as a real "natural antidepressant" by stimulating the production of serotonin and dopamine, the neurotransmitters of joy and motivation.

Other research has explored the effects of laughter on specific populations, such as the elderly, hospitalized children or women with breast cancer. All these studies converge to underline the multiple benefits of laughter on emotional well-being, resilience in the face of illness, and overall quality of life. Laughter appears to be a real "complementary medicine" that can be integrated into care protocols to optimize patient management.

Of course, researchers emphasize the importance of distinguishing between voluntary laughter and spontaneous laughter. If both have positive effects, it is authentic and shared laughter that seems most beneficial for our mental health. That's why laughter yoga workshops or hospital clown interventions are increasingly recommended in health facilities. They help to create favourable conditions for the emergence of genuine, communicative and liberating laughter.

Finally, affective neuroscience sheds light on the brain mechanisms underlying the benefits of laughter. Thanks to functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), it has been observed that laughter activates specific regions of the brain involved in positive emotions, reward and stress regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala or the hippocampus. Laughter acts as a real "brain gymnastics" which enhances neuronal plasticity and promotes optimal functioning of our emotional brain.

Thus, the scientific evidence of the benefits of laughter for our mental and emotional health continues to accumulate. They invite us to actively cultivate our sense of humour and to incorporate laughter into our well-being and personal development strategies. Whether through daily exercises, collective workshops or complementary therapies, laughter appears as a powerful lever of resilience, fulfillment and joy of life. As Mark Twain summed it up: "A minute of laughter is equal to ten minutes of jogging on a rowing machine". So, let's not hesitate to exercise our zygomatic muscles to take care of our overall health!

Key points to remember:

- Numerous rigorous scientific studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of laughter on mental and emotional health.
- Dr. Lee Berk showed that laughter increases the number and activity of immune cells, decreases cortisol levels (the stress hormone), and increases the production of endorphins (the well-being hormones).
- Dr. Michael Miller found that regular laughter improves the endothelial function of the arteries, acting as a "vascular gymnastics" that protects the heart and prevents cardiovascular risks.
- Dr. Rokia Ballo showed that regular practice of laughter yoga significantly reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, while improving quality of life and social connection.

- Laughter appears as a "complementary medicine" that can be incorporated into care protocols to optimize patient management.
- Authentic and shared laughter seems to be the most beneficial for mental health, hence the importance of laughter yoga workshops and hospital clown interventions.
- Affective neuroscience has shown that laughter activates specific regions of the brain involved in positive emotions, reward and stress regulation, acting as a "brain gymnastics".
- It is important to actively cultivate one's sense of humour and integrate laughter into personal well-being and personal development strategies to strengthen resilience, fulfillment, and joy of life.