

Here's what happens to your body during a good giggle

By Laura Beil, [Women's Health](#), Thursday Mar 14, 2013

Brain

As you hear a punch line, your brain ignites its centers for higher thought, muscle function, and emotion. Their conclusion: What a riot! The muscles around your eyes and cheeks start spontaneously contracting. Your noggin shoots a signal to your brain stem, the body's HQ for lung functions like breathing and laughter.

Lungs

Your diaphragm and chest muscles tighten, forcing air out of your lungs. That air rushes through your windpipe, blowing over your larynx. Your vocal cords vibrate and emit short, unfettered vowel sounds like ha-ha or ho-ho.

Eyes

If what has you going is really funny, your eyes start to water.

Heart

The sudden exit of air from your lungs creates an urgent call for oxygen. Your heart rate and blood pressure ramp up to help ferry more O₂ to your organs.

Muscles

While facial and core muscles tense, the rest of your muscles become weaker or less coordinated. Hence, it can feel impossible to walk straight while laughing hard. Your obliques are also working to help expel air. You may burn a few extra calories.

Hormones

A side-splitting laugh can help release endorphins, those natural opiates often triggered by exercise. Your pain threshold might shoot up, at least temporarily. Loads of chuckling may also dial down production of the stress hormone cortisol--a happy thing, since too much cortisol has been linked to exhaustion and depression.

Emotions

It's true: Laughter is contagious. Some scientists speculate it evolved as an early bonding mechanism. If they're right, sharing a laugh with someone could help the two of you connect emotionally.

Sources: Donald Casadonte, D.M.A., and Dianne Fidelibus, P.C., Columbus State Community College; Robin Dunbar, Ph.D., University of Oxford; Peter McGraw, Ph.D., University of Colorado at Boulder; Willibald Ruch, Ph.D., University of Zurich