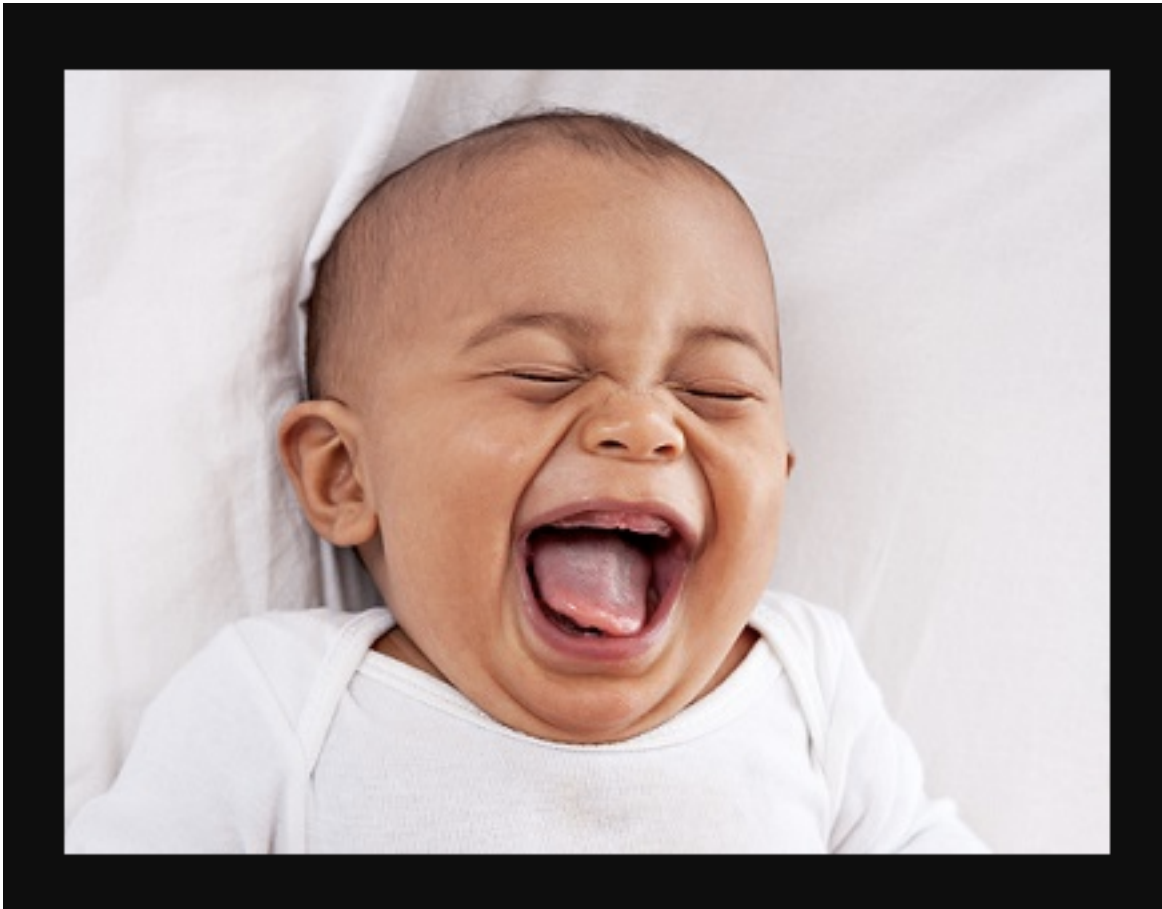


# The Funny Thing About Laughter

*by Michael Flocker*



Laughter is an ancient and unanimous human trait. It is a universal social emotion that exists across all boundaries, in every culture on Earth. No matter where in the world you find yourself, where language may fail, laughter will always be instantly recognized and understood by all human cultures.

It's a weird thing, really. When the response is triggered, the muscles around our rib cages contract and express short bursts of air, not unlike the barking of a dog or bleating of a sheep. It's a much more primal way of expressing emotion than language,

because it's entirely different from language. Consider a person who suffers a stroke. They may lose their ability to speak, but they never lose their ability to laugh.

Another curious thing about laughter is that it's not based solely on humor. Of course, a good joke may get a laugh, but laughter can mean so many other things. When a person falls down and laughs at himself, he is saying, "I'm okay, don't worry." When children wrestle, their giggling signals a lack of aggression and a confirmation that "this is all in fun." And when your date laughs at your super-corny jokes, it may not be a comment on your comedic skills, so much as a subtle message that they are interested in you and are lowering their defenses.

Even in the animal kingdom, laughter is present among most primates and many other mammals. As with the wrestling children, laughter is associated with play. The right kind of grunt, shriek or giddy panting can signify playful intent, and a lack of aggression.

In humans, laughter can diminish stress by reducing adrenaline and lowering blood stress hormones. It stimulates the production of endorphins and antibodies, and can even help strengthen certain white blood cells that help to fortify the immune system. It's good for your lungs, your heart and your psyche all at once.

According to certified grief counselor (!) and author Tracee Dunblazier, laughter also aligns with our chakras. "Energetically, the heart opens or expands when we laugh and allows for all of the other energy centers (chakras) to release denser energies and align with the higher frequencies that enter the body." She points to three different kinds of laughter that each align with different, corresponding chakras:

- "**The chortle** laugh is centered in the head and throat and expands the throat chakra, allowing a better flow of communication."
- "**The guffaw** laugh is centered in the belly, expands the second and third chakras, and will help you release your fear of not being able to control the situation, allowing you to find an empowering position in it."
- "**The chuckle** is centered in the heart, the place in the physical body where we create hormones of peace and the energy center where we align with our higher

self. The chuckle opens the heart, allowing for a stronger flow of energy to the rest of the system.”

Clearly, there is a lot more to laughter than meets the eye. It certainly is good for us, and it's a highly effective means of bonding and communicating non-verbally. But most interestingly, the science behind it all tells us that laughter has less to do with humor and more to do with social behavior. It's about letting others know that we like them and we understand them.

So, the funny thing is that laughter is not necessarily the result of a joke. Consider this:

A horse walks into a bar, and the bartender says, “Hey, why the long face?”

See? Nothing.