

SHARE A LAUGH

Difficulty: **CASUAL** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **5 MINS**

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Quite simply, laughter feels good. It can also promote our long-term **health**, producing **soothing effects** on our respiratory, cardiovascular, and nervous systems.

But, especially if you've been spending lots of time alone, you might not be laughing very often. In fact, laughter occurs **30 times more frequently** in social situations than in solitude. And laughter isn't something you can just generate on command, the way you might write a **gratitude letter** or **meditate**—at least not genuine, side-clutching giggles.

Research suggests that simply hearing a recording of people laughing will almost certainly give you the urge to smile, and may even make you chuckle along with them.

TIME REQUIRED

It can take just seconds to change your mood. Play this brief audio clip when you need a moment of levity.

HOW TO DO IT

Have you ever heard people laughing and couldn't help but smile, even if you didn't know what they were laughing about? Or laughed so hard with a friend that you couldn't stop, even after the joke had passed? Maybe you've heard a laugh track on your favorite sitcom.

It turns out that laughter is contagious. In other words, we instinctively mimic each others' laughter even when we don't know what's funny. This practice takes advantage of that, so all you have to do is listen to people laughing—and you may find yourself in stitches, too.

If it sounds a little contrived, try suspending your skepticism for a moment. You may find it's hard to keep a straight face when you hear all those snickers and guffaws.

Transcript: An audio collection of people laughing in various ways, with snickers and guffaws strewn into the clip.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Provine, R. R. **Contagious laughter: Laughter is a sufficient stimulus for laughs and smiles.** *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* 30, 1-4 (1992).

Students listened to an 18-second audio recording of laughter. Over 85% of the students smiled the first time they heard it, while nearly half laughed.

WHY TO TRY IT

The benefits of laughter have a lot to do with how it evolved in our species in the first place.

Researchers believe that laughter is analogous to “play vocalizations” in rats, dogs, chimpanzees, and other animals. In other words, laughter is a signal to others that we are being playful and our intentions are kind and cooperative, not threatening or aggressive. Laughter is meant to make us and the people around us feel good and safe.

Laughter also [produces](#) endogenous opioid activity in the brain, which goes along with the pleasurable sensation it creates and may encourage us to bond with the people we’re laughing with.

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

