
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Laughter is bad for you



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English with me, Finn.

Neil

And me, Neil.

Finn

Neil, I'm going to tell you a joke.

Neil

OK, come on.

Finn

Which part of learning the English language are boxers best at?

Neil

Which part of English are boxers best at? I don't know.

Finn

Punch-uation (punctuation).

Neil

That's actually quite funny.

Finn

Do you really think so?

Neil

I do, yes.

Finn

Well, I'm glad I made you laugh. But you might not thank me for it after the programme.

Neil

Why's that?

Finn

Because a paper published by the British Medical Journal says that laughter is not always the best medicine, and sometimes, it can actually be harmful.

Neil

Well, in that case I definitely won't be laughing at your jokes any more! And, to be honest, it wasn't funny anyway.

Finn

Anyway, today we'll be exploring the connection between laughter and health, and looking at some health-related vocabulary. But before we get into the story, Neil: a question.

You're a parent. At what age do babies begin to laugh? Is it:

- a) 0-3 months
- b) 3-6 months
- c) 6-8 months

Neil

Right I'm pretty sure, unless my memory is very bad, that it's a) 0-3 months.

Finn

OK, well, we will find out if you're right at the end of the programme. OK, so laughter, as I said, is generally thought of as a good thing. There's a phrase I said earlier which is:

laughter is the best medicine.

Neil

Yes, and talking of medicine, there are many medical studies which examine the benefits of laughter – it reduces stress, it's good for your heart, things like that. But now you're telling me it can have some negative effects?

Finn

Well, why don't we listen to Professor Robin Ferner, who is one of the authors of the research paper. How many negative effects of laughter does he mention?

Robin Ferner, University of Birmingham

We found people with heart rhythm disturbance which had stopped their heart, we found people who had fainted, we found people whose gullets had burst, we found people who'd dislocated their jaws or burst their lungs.

Neil

Quite a few! It seems laughing can be **no laughing matter!**

Finn

Indeed – he mentions five problems caused by laughter, including heart rhythm disturbance, fainting, burst gullets, dislocated jaws and even burst lungs.

Neil

Some of those sound quite nasty. **Fainting** is when you lose consciousness and pass out; and your **gullet** is the tube through which food passes from the mouth to the stomach, so a burst gullet would be horrible.

Finn

I think it would be very bad! We also heard about burst **lungs** – lungs are the organs in your chest that you use to breathe. And – I think you'd have to be laughing very hard to do

this – to get a **dislocated jaw**. To dislocate something is to move it out of its normal place or position, so you dis-locate it. A dislocated jaw – ouch.

Neil

Well, thankfully there is no danger of dislocated jaws with your jokes Finn!

Finn

OK! Well, in fact, these five dangers are only some that were mentioned in the study.

Neil

But surely, there must have been some positive findings?

Finn

Yes, let's listen to Professor Robin Ferner again – which health benefit does he mention?

Robin Ferner, University of Birmingham

You actually use energy when you laugh, you move your diaphragm, you expand your lungs, and both those things can be helpful. For example, it's said that laughing for quarter of an hour will burn up 40 kcal, and if you laughed all day you'd use up about 2,000 calories.

Finn

That's more like it! Laughing can help you lose weight, because you use energy when you laugh.

Neil

In fact, quite a lot of energy: if you laughed all day you'd use 2,000 calories, which is what most people consume in a day.

Finn

He also thinks laughing makes people feel better, and it can reduce the chance of having a **heart attack**.

Neil

So overall – what's the story – laughing: good or bad?

Finn

Well, he says for most people, most of the time, laughing is a great thing. And well, that's good, because I like to laugh, don't you Neil?

Neil

Oh yes I do.

Finn

Earlier I asked you Neil, at what age do babies begin to laugh? Was it 0-3 months, 3-6 months or 6-8 months?

Neil

And I said 0-3 months.

Finn

Well, Neil, the answer was in fact b) 3-6 months. A little bit later! And 0-3 months, which was your answer, Neil, is when babies smile for the first time.

Neil

Well, you **had the last laugh** there Finn.

Finn

Very good – and if you have the last laugh it means you're successful in the end. Right, that's it for this programme. Do log on to bbclearningenglish.com for more 6 Minute English.

Goodbye!

Neil

Bye.

Vocabulary

laughter is the best medicine

a phrase which means that laughing is a good way to be happy and stop worrying

no laughing matter

something very serious that you should not make jokes about

fainting

losing consciousness for a short time, usually falling to the ground

gullet

the tube through which food passes from the mouth to the stomach

lungs

the organs in your chest which you use to breathe

dislocated

(of a bone) moved suddenly out of its correct position

jaw

the lower part of your face (your chin and lower teeth)

heart attack

a serious medical problem when the heart stops working properly and causes chest pain

to have the last laugh

to finally be successful, often after an argument or disagreement