

Laughter, Life Expectancy & Good Humour

A NewsForBC source pack and Saturday feature draft · Prepared July 7, 2026 for publication Saturday, July 11, 2026

Short verdict: There is real research linking laughter frequency, sense of humour, and positive psychological well-being with mortality, cardiovascular risk, or disability outcomes. But the evidence does not prove that laughter alone extends life, and there is no valid formula saying a specific number of laughs adds a specific number of years.

The NewsForBC article

Headline: Can laughter help us live longer? What the research says about good humour and health

The article is written as a public-health literacy feature: laughter is treated as a signal of connection, coping, mood and resilience — not as a miracle cure.

Public link once published: <https://newsforbc.com/laughter-life-expectancy-good-humour-research.html>

Local source note: <https://newsforbc.com/research/laughter-life-expectancy-2026-07-11/source-note.md>

Core findings at a glance

Study	Population / follow-up	Main finding	Best caution
Yamagata Study	17,152 Japanese adults age 40+; median 5.4 years	Laughing less than once/month was associated with higher all-cause mortality vs laughing at least weekly: HR 1.95.	Observational; low laughter may reflect illness, stress, depression or isolation.
JAGES cohort	14,233 Japanese adults age 65+; 3 years	Never/almost-never laughing was associated with higher functional disability risk: HR 1.42.	No significant all-cause mortality trend in this study.
HUNT 15-year	53,556 Norwegian participants	Cognitive sense of humour linked with lower mortality in some outcomes, especially women/CVD and infection mortality.	Sense of humour is not the same as daily laughter; effects varied by sex/outcome.
Positive well-being meta-analysis	70 prospective studies across healthy/disease groups	Positive psychological well-being associated with lower mortality in initially healthy populations: HR 0.82.	Broader than laughter; includes optimism, joy, life satisfaction and humour.

Article draft

Can laughter help us live longer? What the research says about good humour and health

The science does not prove that every joke adds minutes to your life. But several large studies suggest laughter, humour and positive emotional coping may be signals of resilience worth taking seriously.

There may be a serious reason to protect good humour in daily life. Research from Japan and Norway has linked laughter or a strong sense of humour with lower death risk, lower disability risk, fewer cardiovascular signals or better survival in some groups.

The important word is linked. The studies do not prove that laughter alone makes people live longer. They do suggest that a life with more laughter may also be a life with more connection, better coping, lower stress load, more mobility, less depression or stronger community ties.

The closest study to “does laughter predict mortality?”

The Yamagata Study followed 17,152 adults aged 40 and older in Japan for a median of 5.4 years. Researchers grouped people by how often they laughed: at least weekly, at least monthly but less than weekly, or less than monthly.

After adjustment for age, gender, hypertension, smoking and alcohol status, people who laughed less than once per month had a higher all-cause mortality risk than people who laughed at least once per week. The reported hazard ratio was 1.95, with a 95% confidence interval of 1.16 to 3.09.

Plain English: in that study, the lowest-laughter group had about 95% higher mortality hazard than the at-least-weekly-laughter group. That is not the same as saying laughter caused the difference, but it is strong enough to deserve attention.

Older adults: disability signal, not a clear death signal

The JAGES prospective cohort study followed 14,233 older Japanese adults aged 65 and over for three years. Those who never or almost never laughed had a higher risk of later functional disability than those who laughed almost every day. The reported hazard ratio was 1.42.

That same study did not find a significant trend for all-cause mortality over the follow-up period. That distinction matters: laughter may be more visible as an early marker of aging, activity, mood and social connection than as a simple death predictor.

Humour as a coping resource

Norway's HUNT studies looked at sense of humour rather than daily laughter. A 7-year study reported lower mortality hazards among people with stronger humour scores, especially under age 65. A later 15-year follow-up found that the cognitive component of sense of humour was associated with lower all-cause mortality in women and lower infection-related mortality in both men and women.

In ordinary language, this is not about being the loudest person in the room. It is about the ability to perceive humour, hold perspective and keep some mental flexibility when life gets hard.

What the research does not say

- It does not say laughter cures disease.
- It does not say people are responsible for illness if they are not cheerful.
- It does not give a calculator for how many years laughter adds to life.
- It does not mean cruel humour, denial or forced positivity is healthy.
- It does suggest that humour, connection and emotional resilience belong in the conversation about public health.

A B.C. takeaway

British Columbians are living with high costs, medical waits, family stress, wildfire seasons, loneliness and political anger. A good laugh will not fix those problems. But it can interrupt the spiral for a moment, bring people back into the same room, and remind a family or neighbourhood that not every serious life has to be humourless.

NewsForBC view: a healthy society should not treat laughter as trivial. It is not a cure, but it may be a sign that people are still connected enough, safe enough and hopeful enough to breathe.

Recommended reading list

Yamagata Study: laughter frequency, mortality and cardiovascular events

Where: Journal of Epidemiology, 2020

Why read it: 17,152 adults age 40+; median 5.4-year follow-up; low laughter frequency associated with higher all-cause mortality.

PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30956258/>

Open full text: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7064551/>

DOI: 10.2188/jea.JE20180249

JAGES cohort: laughter, functional disability and mortality

Where: Journal of Epidemiology, 2021

Why read it: 14,233 older adults; low laughter associated with higher functional disability risk but not significant all-cause mortality trend.

PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32418940/>

Open full text: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8021882/>

DOI: 10.2188/jea.JE20200051

Laughter is the Best Medicine? Cardiovascular disease among older adults

Where: Journal of Epidemiology, 2016

Why read it: Cross-sectional JAGES study; rare laughter associated with higher heart disease and stroke prevalence.

PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26972732/>

Open full text: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5037252/>

DOI: 10.2188/jea.JE20150196

CIRCS: laughter frequency and blood-pressure trends

Where: Journal of Epidemiology, 2021

Why read it: Longitudinal blood-pressure study; infrequent laughter associated with long-term blood-pressure increase among middle-aged men.

PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32092749/>

Open full text: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7813767/>

DOI: 10.2188/jea.JE20190140

HUNT 15-year: sense of humour and causes of mortality

Where: Psychosomatic Medicine, 2016

Why read it: Cognitive sense-of-humour component associated with lower mortality in selected groups/outcomes.

PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26569539/>

DOI: 10.1097/PSY.0000000000000275

HUNT 7-year: sense of humour and mortality

Where: International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine, 2010

Why read it: Large Norwegian cohort; sense of humour associated with survival, especially under age 65.

PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20848871/>

DOI: 10.2190/PM.40.2.a

Positive psychological well-being and mortality: quantitative review

Where: Psychosomatic Medicine, 2008

Why read it: Meta-analysis; positive psychological well-being associated with lower mortality in initially healthy populations.

PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18725425/>

DOI: 10.1097/PSY.0b013e31818105ba

Bottom line for readers

Laughter is best treated as a serious social-health signal: not a treatment, not a guarantee, but a useful marker of connection, perspective and resilience. If laughter disappears from a person, family or community, it may be worth asking what pain, pressure or isolation has moved in.