

Study: Laughing may be the best medicine

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

Want the potential mental and physical health benefits of meditation without the work of chasing away all those intrusive thoughts and feelings? Try laughing, a new study suggests.

Laughter – the real kind associated with genuine joy and mirth – sets off brain wave patterns quite similar to those generated when experienced meditators ply their mindfulness skills, a new study finds.

Researchers know that when hooked up to an electroencephalograph, which measures electrical activity among neurons in the brain, those practiced in the art of meditation are able to achieve a brain state of what is called gamma brain wave activity: In it, virtually all of the brain's higher cortical regions begin to operate on a common frequency, somewhere in the 30- to 40-hertz bandwidth.

Unlike the dreamless sleep in which alpha brain waves sweep across the brain, or the cacophony of alert mental activity associated with beta brain waves, gamma waves tend to be synchronous throughout the brain. It's the brain wave pattern associated with cognitive "flow," with being "in the zone," with the highest state of cognitive processing.

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