

Study shows out laughter is contagious

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Laughter is said to be contagious and now British scientists studying how the brain responds to emotive sounds believe they understand why.

Researchers at University College London and Imperial College London have shown positive sounds such as laughter trigger a response in the area of a listener's brain that is activated when we smile, as though preparing facial muscles to laugh.

"It seems that it's absolutely true that 'laugh and the whole world laughs with you'," said Dr Sophie Scott, a Wellcome Trust Senior Research Fellow at UCL's Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, UCL. "We've known for some time now that when we are talking to someone, we often mirror their behavior, copying the words they use and mimicking their gestures. Now we've shown that the same appears to apply to laughter, too -- at least at the level of the brain."

The research appears in the current issue of the Journal of Neuroscience.

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