

HOME | FRONT PAGE | CITY | SPORTS | NATIONAL | WORLD | OPINION | ENTERTAINMENT
 OTTAWA.COM | HIGH TECH | BUSINESS | PRESS CLIPS | STOCKS/MUTUALS | INTERNET COMMUNITY
 SEARCH/ARCHIVES | CAREERCLICK | CARCLICK | HOMESCLICK | CLASSIFIED
 BIRTHS | DEATHS | PERSONALS | ABOUT US | ADVERTISING INFO

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NATIONAL

[National News](#)

[World](#)

[Middle East Crisis](#)

[Military Crisis](#)

[Pierre Elliott Trudeau](#)

[Press Clips](#)

[Gargoyle](#)

[War on Drugs](#)

[Canada Dailies](#)

[Parliament Hill Cam](#)

[Pierre Elliott Trudeau](#)

ELECTION 2000

[Breaking Election News](#)

[From The Paper](#)

LOCAL RIDINGS

[Ottawa Centre](#)

[Ottawa South](#)

[Ottawa West](#)

[Ottawa Orleans](#)

[Ottawa-Vanier](#)

[Nepean-Carleton](#)

[Hull-Aylmer](#)

[Gatineau](#)

[Glengarry-Prescott-Russell](#)

[Lanark-Carleton](#)

[Leeds-Grenville](#)

[Pontiac-Gatineau-Labelle](#)

[Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke](#)

[Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh](#)

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National OTTAWA CITIZEN Online

Thursday 16 November 2000

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A hearty laugh a day keeps the doctor away

Sharon Kirkey

The Ottawa Citizen

A lousy sense of humour may be a contributing factor in heart disease, according to a new study that's the first to hold up scientific proof that laughter may indeed be the best medicine.

A study released yesterday found that people with heart disease laugh less than others and are much less likely to use humour to deal with uncomfortable situations.

"We know that exercising, not smoking and eating foods low in saturated fat will reduce the risk of heart disease. Perhaps regular, hearty laughter should be added to the list," says Dr. Michael Miller.

Dr. Miller, director of the Center for Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Centre, was speaking at the annual scientific meeting of the American Heart Association.

Researchers have long been tallying the physical risks for heart disease, such as obesity and high blood pressure. But mental stress has also recently been implicated. Scientists have found that stress can affect the endothelium -- the lining of the blood vessels that feed the heart-- by releasing substances in the blood that can cause the blood vessels to narrow.