

Here's a funny way to protect your heart

BY MARK HENDERSON, SCIENCE EDITOR

THIS may sound funny, but scientists say that laughter is a good way of protecting yourself against a heart attack.

People who have had heart attacks, or who have been treated for heart disease, are up to 40 per cent less likely to laugh in various situations than those in normal health, according to research published by American cardiologists. The findings by researchers at the University of Maryland in Baltimore, which were presented yesterday to the American Heart Association, suggest that laughing when angry might offset the damage done to the arteries by stress.

Michael Miller, director of the Centre for Preventive Cardiology, who led the research, said: "We don't know why laughing protects the heart, but we do know that mental stress is associated with impairment of the endothelium, the protective barrier lining our blood vessels." More research was needed to find out if laughter released some as yet unidentified endothelial protectant, Dr Miller added.