

# Laughter great for job: expert

The office prankster who constantly jokes and laughs may well be doing their job better than more serious co-workers.

And office gossip is good for business and allows workers the chance to let off steam or relieve stress, separate research reveals.

A "good old gossip" about colleagues or bosses can help relieve tension or anxiety.

According to biochemist Jane Yip, laughter not only makes people feel better, it helps light up the region in the brain responsible for clear thinking and good judgment. "When we laugh, we think better," Ms Yip said.

"There is a nerve network which goes from our emotional centre to our .. thought centre in the brain" she said.

As well as working better, the office clown probably has a higher immune system, lower stress levels and will not have to rush to the gym after work, she said.

"Five minutes of good belly laughing is equal to 20 minutes of jogging.

"It releases endorphins, car

ries immune cells through the body and raises the metabolic rate," she said.

Unfortunately for most people, bringing humour back into life will take some work.

People had to want to laugh and made a concerted effort to see the funny side of life, she said.

"In order to laugh, we have to think.

"People have to want to see things as funny ... to turn around bad situations and see the humour in them."

Practising what she preaches, Ms Yip meets with a laughter group in Newcastle once a week and today will co-host a conference in Newcastle on laughter.

Hopefully, people would realise there was a different, more humorous and happy way of living, she said.

"In society, somehow we are beginning to lose that sense of humour, that light-hearted approach to life.

"People are heavy-hearted because they do not believe there is a different life - we are trying to make them laugh and show there is."

According to Kathryn Wad-

dington, a senior lecturer in psychology at London's City University, the best gossips are usually extroverts who enjoy being the centre of attention.

"There is definitely a skill to being a good office gossip," Ms Waddington said.

She interviewed 80 health workers as part of new research into gossip presented at the British Psychological Society's occupational psychology conference in Winchester.

The women she interviewed were more likely to admit they enjoyed gossiping, while men often denied they were gossips, preferring to use terms such as "networking" to explain their casual conversations with colleagues or senior staff.

"People gossip to get things off their chest and usually feel better for it," Ms Waddington said.

"In the short term it is good for business because it can relieve stress."

However, malicious gossip could have a devastating effect on victims, she said.

Bullying and harassment of staff could also be worsened by office gossip.