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VIEWPOINT

April Fool's Day and the Medicinal Value of Humor

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- In 16th-century France, the start of the new year was traditionally observed on April 1. Until 1562, when Pope Gregory introduced a new Christian calendar, the new year began on January 1. Some people, however, had not heard of or did not believe the date change and continued to celebrate New Year's Day on April 1, "April Fools Day." They would be sent on a "fool's errand" or tricked into believing that something false was true. In France today, April 1 is called *Poisson d'Avril*. French children fool their friends by taping a paper fish to their backs. When the friend discovers this trick, the prankster yells *Poisson d'Avril!* (April Fish!)
- A common trick on April Fool's Day for teachers in the 19th century was to say to pupils, "Look! A flock of geese!" and point upwards. Other April Fool jokes might include school children telling a classmate that school has been canceled or college students setting their clocks an hour behind to trick their roommates into showing up for the wrong class — or not at all. Some practical jokes are kept up the whole day or until the victim realizes what day it is. Most April Fool jokes are in good fun and not meant to do harm. The most clever April Fool joke is the one who prompts everyone to laugh, especially the person on whom the joke is played.
- "The first of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year." — American humorist Mark Twain
- Laughter is used therapeutically by many hospitals and health care facilities. For example, the University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque has a separate humor room for patients. According to experts in humor physiology or "gelotology," laughter has many therapeutic uses. By aiding ventilation and clearing mucosal plugs, laughter can help those afflicted with chronic obstructive lung disease. Laughter can also increase arterial and venous circulation, causing an increased movement of oxygen to tissues.

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