

# Swearing can increase self-confidence, physical strength and risky behavior

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Keele University researchers have found that swearing can increase self-confidence and risk-taking behavior, as well as boosting physical strength.

Led by Dr. Richard Stephens, the team carried out a study which aimed to identify the psychological pathway by which swearing can have [beneficial effects](#) on physical tasks. They were particularly interested in whether swearing increased "state disinhibition," which is a state of lowered [self-control](#) and lack of restraint.

The study, which has been published in the *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, found that participants could perform a chair push-up—lifting oneself from a chair seat using the arms—for longer after repeating a swear word.

Participants also displayed more risk-taking behavior in an online task involving pumping up a balloon as much as possible without it bursting. Risk-taking behavior increased by 8% when using swear words whilst pumping up the balloon, compared to using neutral dialog.

The humorous quality of swearing was also found to be an important psychological route for boosting physical strength, akin to "letting go."

The researchers hope that this evidence can benefit society by helping individuals to improve personal performance, for example gaining increased [self-confidence](#) by using swear words as preparation for performing in front of large public audiences.

Dr. Stephens said: "Swearing appears to produce a state of 'hot cognitions,' helping us downplay everyday fears and concerns. This can lead to benefits in some situations, such as [physical strength](#), shown by our participants being able to hold the chair push-up for a longer time after swearing.

"We provided evidence of several possible psychological routes by which this may come about, all related to lowering self-control or 'letting go'—but humor, the funny side of swearing, turned out to be the most

important of the factors we assessed. Comedians have long known the link between laughter and a well-placed swear word. Our study suggests generating humor may be one element by which [swearing](#) can help people in everyday situations, by just 'going for it' a little more."

**More information:** Richard Stephens et al, Effect of swearing on strength: Disinhibition as a potential mediator, *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/17470218221082657](https://doi.org/10.1177/17470218221082657)

Provided by Keele University

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