

## 5 Reasons Singing Is Good for Your Health

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The YOU Docs love good music (one of us, Mehmet, cranks up Springsteen in the operating room; the other, Mike, is a huge fan of both classical piano and Frankie Valli). But when it comes to singing, we don't care whether you're first soprano in the church choir or you just belt out off-key oldies in the shower with the door locked. Bursting into song lifts your health in ways that surprise even us (and might make the cast of *Glee* America's healthiest people). The benefits should get you singing out even if you can't carry a tune in a bucket.

**1. Lowers your blood pressure.** You may have heard the heartwarming news story about a woman in Boston whose blood pressure shot up just before knee-replacement surgery. When drugs alone weren't enough, she began singing her favorite hymns, softly at first, then with more passion. Her blood pressure dropped enough for the procedure, which went off without a hitch. Now, we're not suggesting you trade blood pressure treatments for a few verses of "Amazing Grace." But try adding singing to your routine. It releases pent-up emotions, boosts relaxation, and reminds you of happy times, all of which help when stress and blood pressure spike. ([Check out these foods that can lower your blood pressure, too.](#))

**2. Boosts your "cuddle" hormone.** Yep, oxytocin, the same hormone that bonds moms and new babies and that makes you and your partner feel extra close after a romp in the hay, also surges after you croon a tune with your peeps (your pals, not those marshmallow chicks!).

**3. Allows you to breathe easier.** If you or someone you know is coping with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), singing just twice a week could make breathing feel easier and life feel better. In fact, in England there are "singing for breathing" workshops. The benefits, said one person with the lung disease, "It makes me feel on top of the world . . . and it makes COPD a lot easier to live with." Why wait for a workshop? Try crooning a tune or two on your own. ([See what other benefits deep breathing can bring you.](#))

**4. Helps you find serenity after cancer.** Surviving cancer is a major milestone, but afterward, you still have to cope with the memories (tests, diagnosis, treatments) and quiet will-it-come-back worries. Vocalizing can help you blow off steam and stress. Turns out that singing actually calms the sympathetic nervous system (which tenses up when you do) and boosts activity in the parasympathetic nervous system (which makes you relax).

**5. Rewires the brain after a stroke.** Plenty of people who've survived a stroke but lost the ability to speak learn to communicate again by singing their thoughts. Singing activates areas on the right side of the brain, helping stroke survivors to take over the job of speaking when areas on the left side no longer function. Called melodic intonation therapy (MIT), it's used in some stroke rehab programs, and insurance may cover it. Ask about it if someone you love has speech difficulties from a stroke.

That's not all singing can do. It also helps everyday health, increasing immunity, reducing stress for new moms, quieting snoring, easing anxiety in ways that may also ease irritable bowel syndrome, and simply making you feel happier. That's a great return on something you can do in a choir, in your car, with your kids, in the shower, or even (you knew we were heading here) in a glee club. Here's how to put the "glee factor" to work for you:

**Off-key? Squeaky? Tone-deaf? You may get more out of it!** In one study, amateur singers felt a rush of joy after warbling, but trained professionals didn't experience any extra elation from singing. Too bad for them, good news for us and for you. You don't have to be good to feel the benefits!

**Hymns? R&B? Hip-hop? It doesn't matter.** Just choose tunes that mean something to you. You'll pour more heart into singing and conjure up good memories and healing feelings. You like almost everything? Songs that let you hold long notes tend to pack in more emotion, so "Summertime" by George Gershwin may work better than "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy."

**Get the kids in on the act.** Thanks to the TV show *Glee*, glee clubs (also called show choirs) are getting hot in schools across the United States and Canada. That's great, because kids get a special set of benefits from musical expression, including better grades, less risky behaviour, even higher SAT scores. Now those are good reasons for all the "gleeks" to belt out "Don't Stop Believin'."

If you are interested in singing in a group please contact Doris Henderson

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