

SINGING IS GOOD FOR YOU - IT'S OFFICIAL



A quick search of the internet reveals many notes and articles on the benefits of singing. Decades of research internationally has proved an unequivocal link between singing and well-being, both physical and psychological. The top health benefits are:

- more energy
- lower blood pressure
- greater lung capacity
- relief from asthma and other breathing problems
- elevated mood
- increased concentration and improved memory
- stronger stomach muscles and better posture
- toned facial muscles.

A decade ago, any mention of a choir would probably have brought Sunday morning hymns to mind. But there's been a revolution in attitudes towards joining a local choir. Adding well-known, mainstream music to the repertoire and the popularity of choir-based programmes, for example those under the leadership of Gareth Malone, has enhanced the role of communal singing. It is estimated that 2.8m Britons are now members of a choir.

Singing in a choir is beneficial in several different ways. Recent research reveals that group singing not only helps forge social bonds, it also does so particularly quickly, acting as an excellent icebreaker. Community singing is effective for bonding large groups, making it an ideal behaviour to improve our broader social networks. This is particularly valuable in today's often alienating world, where loneliness is seen as a major factor

The physiological benefits of singing, and music more generally, have long been explored. Music making exercises the brain as well as the body, but singing is particularly beneficial for improving breathing, posture and muscle tension. Listening to and participating in music has been shown to be effective in pain relief, too, probably due to the release of neurochemicals such as β -endorphin (a natural painkiller responsible for the "high" experienced after intense exercise). There's also

some evidence to suggest that music can play a role in controlling the effectiveness of the immune system by reducing the stress hormone cortisol and boosting the Immunoglobulin A antibody. Singing has also been shown to improve our sense of happiness and wellbeing. Research has found, for example, that people feel more positive after actively singing than they do after passively listening to music or after chatting about positive life events. Improved mood probably in part comes directly from the release of positive neurochemicals such as β -endorphin, dopamine and serotonin. It is also likely to be influenced by changes in our sense of social closeness with others.

Music has been used in different cultures throughout history in many healing rituals and is already used as a therapy in our own culture (for the relief of mental illness, breathing conditions and language impairment, for example). Everyone can sing – however much we might protest – meaning it is one of the most accessible forms of music making, too. Song is a powerful therapy indeed.

We are particularly fortunate that there are a lot of musical groups operating in the Lancaster District and that means that there are lots of opportunities to become involved. Local singing groups will welcome new members with open arms even if you consider that you are not a good singer or not a singer at all! You will find groups to suit all tastes - ladies' choirs, male voice choirs, mixed choral groups, community choirs - singing a whole range of music.

So, why not give it a try? You might surprise yourself how good you feel after you've had a really good sing.....

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The Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health at Canterbury Christ Church University is committed to researching the potential value of music, and other participative arts activities, in the promotion of wellbeing and health of individuals and communities.

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