

Health Benefits of Singing



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Scientists say singing boosts immune system.

- Singing strengthens the immune system, according to research by scientists at the University of Frankfurt in Germany, published in the latest edition of the US Journal of Behavioral Medicine. The scientists tested the blood of people who sang in a professional choir in the city, before and after a 60 minute rehearsal of Mozart's Requiem. They found that concentrations of immunoglobulin A - proteins in the immune system which function as antibodies - and hydrocortisone, an anti-stress hormone, increased significantly during the rehearsal. A week later, when they asked members of the choir to listen to a recording of the Requiem without singing, they found the composition of their blood did not change significantly. The researchers, who included **Hans Guenther Bastian from the Institute of Musical Education at Frankfurt University**, concluded singing not only strengthened the immune system but also notably improved the performer's mood.

Singing is good for you.

- Many studies done over a number of years have focused on the health benefits of singing, and the evidence is overwhelming.

- Singing releases endorphins into your system and makes you feel energized and uplifted. People who sing are healthier than people who don't.
- Singing gives the lungs a workout,
- Singing tones abdominal and intercostal muscles and the diaphragm, and stimulates circulation.
- Singing makes us breathe more deeply than many forms of strenuous exercise, so we take in more oxygen, improve aerobic capacity and experience a release of muscle tension as well." — **Professor Graham Welch, Director of Educational Research, University of Surrey, Roehampton, UK**

Singing can help prolong life.

- **Graham Welch, director for advanced music education at London's Roehampton Institute**, states "Singing exercises the vocal cords and keeps them youthful, even in old age. The less age-battered your voice sounds, the more you will feel, and seem, younger." He says that when you break into song, your chest expands and your back and shoulders straighten, thus improving your posture. Singing lifts moods and clears the "blues" by taking your mind off the stresses of the day, as well as releasing pain-relieving endorphins. As you sing along, the professor adds, your circulation is improved, which in turn oxygenates the cells and boosts the body's immune system to ward off minor infections. And "it provides some aerobic exercise for the elderly or disabled," Welch says. A recent German study has shown that active amateur group singing can lead to significant increases in the production of a protein considered as the first line of defense against respiratory infections, and also leads to positive emotional changes. "Given that every human being is, in principle, capable of developing sufficient vocal skills to participate in a chorale for a lifetime, active group singing may be a risk-free, economic, easily accessible, and yet powerful road to enhanced physiological and psychological well-being."

Greg Cohen of George Washington University tracked a Senior Singers Chorale in Arlington, Va. The chorale singers' average age is 80 — the youngest is 65 and the oldest 96. Preliminary data shows the singers suffer less depression, make fewer doctor visits a year, take fewer medications and have increased their other activities.

Singing starts in infancy. **John Lennon, Professor Of Vocal Performance, Emeritus Emporia State University**, says, "I contend that singing is an inborn response in those moments of absolute emotional tranquility. Babies sing to themselves. The fact that we recognize no identifiable melodic sequence does not mean that it is not singing. Such spontaneous oral response has sustained emission, rhythm, pitch variation and emotional expression. Like the infant, we sing because we

feel good and singing makes us feel even better. When we sing to ourselves we are, in effect, communicating with the inner-self ... it may well be counterproductive to one's well being not to sing." Preschool and kindergarten teachers have known for a long time that children learn best through songs. They remember the material easier and it is easier to keep them engaged in the activity. It could be as simple as someone who told us that it was something we shouldn't do because it wasn't pleasant to listen to or the self-talk that says it doesn't sound good enough, so don't do it. Lennon asks, "Is the logic that if one 'sounds better' one 'enjoys' it more? Do we sing primarily to sound better? It is a coveted fringe benefit, but hardly the primary reason why we sing."

Reid Wilson, Ph.D., Associate Clinical Professor Of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine, believes you can, "sing away your woes." Simply choose a familiar song, and then set your troubles to music. For example, instead of crooning the traditional words to Mary Had A Little Lamb, imagine warbling, "My credit card bill is going to be late, going to be late, going to be late; my credit rating will be ruined, and I'll never get a mortgage." Sing your own version of the worry song in your mind, or out loud for a few minutes, until you feel less anxious. It works because "the singing makes you feel ridiculous", says Wilson. "And it's very hard to maintain your distress when you're doing something foolish. You step back from the worry and put it in perspective."

Sound therapist Jovita Wallace says "Sound vibrations massage your aura, going straight to what's out of balance and fixing it."

- Singing the short-a sound, as in ahh, for 2-3 minutes will help banish the blues. It forces oxygen into the blood, which signals the brain to release mood-lifting endorphins.
- To boost alertness, make the long-e sound, as in emit. It stimulates the pineal gland, which controls the body's biological clock.
- Singing the short-e sound, as in echo stimulates the thyroid gland, which secretes hormones that control the speed which digestion and other bodily processes occur.
- Making the long-o sound as in ocean stimulates the pancreas, which regulates blood sugar.
- To strengthen immunity, sing the double-o sound, as in tool. This activates the spleen, which regulates the production of infection fighting white blood cells.

Researchers at the **University of Manchester** have discovered that the sacculus, a little organ in the inner ear, responds to frequencies commonly found in music, & is connected to the part of the brain responsible for registering pleasure. This sacculus is ONLY responsive to low frequency, high intensity sounds, which include singing, & it responds within a few seconds of hearing that kind of sound. So you get immediate pleasure when you sing, regardless of what it sounds like to anyone else. Now if there are no criticisms or put downs from anyone else to cause you pain, you'll find the experience enjoyable and get release of good old pleasure-giving endorphins as well. Singing provides catharsis across the full emotional spectrum. It can give a directly-experienced, felt-sense of happiness. It's a mood lifter & anti depressant with no side effects. And it's not news to health professionals that mental & physical health are intimately linked.

Journal of Music Therapy: Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 125–143. Singing as a Therapeutic Agent, in *The Etude*, 1891—1949 **Bryan C. Hunter, PhD, MT-BCaa Nazareth College, Rochester, New York** - *The Etude* music magazine, founded by Theodore Presser, was one of a number of popular music magazines published in the years prior to the establishment of the music therapy profession in 1950. During its publication run from 1883 to 1957, over 100 music therapy related articles appeared, including 13 on the health benefits of singing published between 1891 and 1949. Written by authors with diverse backgrounds, such as the famous Battle Creek, Michigan physician **John Harvey Kellogg** and Boston music critic **Louis C. Elson**, the articles contained consistent and adamant support regarding the health benefits of singing. The advantages described were both physical and psychological, and were recommended prophylactically for well persons and therapeutically for ill persons. Although the articles varied in perspective, from philosophical to theoretical to pedagogical, there is a consistent holistic medicine theme that appeared almost ahead of its time and no doubt linked to the push for

vocal music education in that era. The importance of The Etude in promulgating ideas that helped shape the early practice of music therapy should not be underestimated. For much of its publication run The Etude was the largest music periodical in print, reaching its peak circulation of 250,000 copies per month in 1924.

Sing yourself happy and fit!

If you have ever wondered why choral singers look to be on a high, here are some of the reasons. The health benefits of singing are well documented:

- Singing improves your mood. It releases the same feel-good brain chemicals as sex and chocolate!
- It is very effective as a stress reliever and improves sleep
- Singing releases pain-relieving endorphins, helping you to forget that painful tooth/knee/whatever
- Your posture improves
- Lung capacity increases
- Singing clears sinuses and respiratory tubes
- Your mental alertness improves
- Singing tones your facial and stomach muscles
- It boosts your immune system, helping to fight disease and prolonging life expectancy
- Your confidence increases

And of course the social benefits are important too:

Singing widens your circle of friends (and some of us go on to the pub afterwards!) Give it a try and see what it can do for you!

Effects of Choir Singing or Listening on Secretory Immunoglobulin A, Cortisol, and Emotional State - Gunter Kreutz^{1,3} Stephan Bongard,² Sonja Rohrmann,² Volker Hodapp,² and Dorothee Grebe¹ - Accepted for publication: November 11, 2003 - The present study investigates the effects of choir music on secretory immunoglobulin A (S-IgA), cortisol, and emotional states in members of a mixed amateur choir. Subjects participated in two conditions during two rehearsals one week apart, namely singing versus listening to choral music. Saliva samples and subjective measures of affect were taken both before each session and 60 min later. Repeated measure analyses of variance were conducted for positive and negative affect scores, S-IgA, and cortisol. Results indicate several significant effects. In particular, singing leads to increases in positive affect and S-IgA, while negative affect is reduced. Listening to choral music leads to an increase in negative affect, and decreases in levels of cortisol. These results suggest that choir singing positively influences both emotional affect and immune competence. The observation that subjective and physiological responses differed between listening and singing conditions invites further investigation of task factors.

Sing for your life! Richard J. B. Willis, BUC Health Ministries Director

- Research over the last decade in relation to the effects of the arts on health suggests that the aesthetic is important to our well-being. A couple of recent studies bear out the statement addressed to Robert Browning: 'There is delight in singing, tho' none hear beside the singer'. The delights are not all in the hearing. Studies into the health benefits of singing conducted at Canterbury University showed positive associations between singing and n feelings of well-being

- greater relaxation responses
- improved breathing and benefit to the heart and immune system n better posture
- enhanced social, spiritual and emotional benefits.

An introductory leaflet by the **Health Education Authority**, linking the arts to health, states: 'The arts clearly have a potential to make a major contribution to our health, well-being and life skills. It is important, however, to capture the evidence of the impact of the arts on health to ensure proper recognition of their effect and the availability of appropriate levels of investment to sustain any positive influences.' The two Canterbury studies provide the evidence from their interviews with members of

the university's choral society: Of the respondents:

- 49% said they received spiritual benefit from their singing (and not necessarily through 'spiritual' music);
- 58% benefited physically;
- 75% emotionally; and
- 87% socially.

Life-Affirming Benefits of Singing - Vocalizing Promotes Well Being By Patty Mills

"Singing fortifies health, widens culture, refines the intelligence, enriches the imagination, makes for happiness and endows life with an added zest." * If you sing in the shower or sing along with the radio, consider taking this raw vocal skill to new heights. Music – the "universal language" not only stirs our deepest emotions, but active participation can increase energy and vigor to see us through even the most stress-filled life commitments. Good vocal technique goes beyond the basics to include both physical and vocal warm-ups, proper nutrition, adequate rest and emotional commitment. An experienced vocal teacher will explore all aspects of posture, abdominal and chest development, tone production and breath control. What health club can promise these benefits?

- Singing increases poise, self-esteem and presentation skills.
- Singing strengthens concentration and memory.
- Singing develops the lungs and promotes superior posture.
- Singing broadens expressive communication.
- Singing adds a rich, more pleasant quality to speech.
- Singing animates the body, mind and spirit.
- Singing enables the performer to delve into characterization/acting.
- Singing stimulates insight into prose and poetry and piques interests in the inner meaning of words.
- Singing enriches one's ability to appreciate the art of great singers.
- Singing is an ageless enjoyment – you are never too young or too old.
- Singing is therapeutic both emotionally and physically.

Solo singing is easy to develop with the assistance of a well-trained vocal coach. Performing opportunities include church/band soloist, cabaret artist, or enjoying your newly developed skill exclusively for self-satisfaction. Opportunities to group singing abound from choirs to classical ensembles, Madrigal troupes, doo-wop, a cappella and more. If you commit to a performing ensemble, be sure the group shares the same emotionally and health-enriching goals you have set for yourself.

Whether or not you become a world-class singer is not important. Sharing the joy of singing will enrich your life far beyond the notes and music. Add a healthy, new dimension to your life – try SINGING!

*American Academy of Teachers of Singing

Patty Mills was an active member of the YankeeMaid Chorus for many years. Most recently she was very involved in marketing and public relations for the chorus. To that end, she wrote this article for publication in the Fairfield/New Haven Counties edition of "Music Notes." In January 2000, we lost Patty to cancer. The YankeeMaids miss Patty and remember her fondly.

The Arts - Music and Singing - Music as a therapeutic medium has demonstrated to be efficacious for pain management (Trauger-Querry & Haghighi, 1999), in facilitating the resolution of grief (Bright, 1999), as a means of finding a personal identity (Smeijsters & van den Hurk, 1999), to improve the lives of people with communications problems related to cognitive impairment (O'Callaghan, 1999), and to enhance the quality of life for Alzheimers patients (Hanser, 1999). Recent longitudinal analysis of music-therapy related articles in the 'Etude' music magazine for the period 1883 to 1957 has also

indicated consistent and adamant support for the (physical and psychological) health benefits of singing (Hunter, 1999)
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