

Why Singing Is Good For You

By Ron Binnie, Organist & Choirmaster, St Mary's Church, Lapworth

Since pre-historic times, people have raised their voices in song. Whether it's a crowd of Welsh rugby fans belting out *Land of my Fathers*, or Frank Sinatra crooning *My Way*, or the Huddersfield Choral Society giving the *Hallelujah Chorus* some welly, it's a natural thing to do, but is it actually good for you? Over many decades, scientific research has shown that singing, either individually or in groups is beneficial on many levels. Here are ten reasons why singing is good for you.

1. Singing relieves stress

In 2017 a study was undertaken in which the amount of **cortisol**, the stress hormone, was measured in participants' saliva before and after singing. Researchers found that cortisol levels were lower after singing, indicating that singers felt more relaxed after belting out a tune.

2. Singing boosts the immune response

A study undertaken in 2004 compared the effects of singing with the effects of simply listening to music. Participants took part in two separate sessions in which they either sang, or listened to music. After singing, people's level of **immunoglobulin A**, an antibody your body secretes to help you fight off infections, was raised. Simply listening to music reduced stress hormones but did not stimulate immunoglobulin A.

3. Group Singing Increases your pain threshold

A study carried out in 2012 found that singing (and drumming and dancing) in a group triggers the release of **endorphins**, the hormone that promotes positive feelings and reduces the perception of pain. Simply listening to music did not produce the same effect. Researchers found the feelings of social connection engendered while singing as a group seems to be behind the boost in pain tolerance rather than the music itself.

4. Singing makes you feel better

There's an increasing amount of evidence that singing releases **serotonin** and **dopamine** – the 'happy' chemicals that boost your mood and make you feel good about yourself. Scientists believe that's one of the reasons why people report being on a high during choir sessions and continuing to feel positive, uplifted and motivated afterwards.

5. Singing improves snoring

Regular singing improves the way you breathe, even when you're not singing. In 2008 a research team interviewed the spouses of choir members as well as the spouses of non-singers. They found that significantly fewer choral singers snored which led them to recommend regular singing as a treatment for snoring.

6. Singing improves lung function

Many studies have shown that singing increases the amount of **oxygen** in your blood. This is because singing involves deep breathing. While singing can't cure any regular diseases, it has been shown that many conditions such as COPD, asthma or cystic fibrosis benefit from gaining strength in the respiratory muscles.

7. Singing develops a sense of connection

Singing alongside others encourages the same feeling of camaraderie and bonding that players in sports teams experience. When people feel bonded together, one of the neurochemicals produced is **oxytocin**, the so-called love hormone. In a 2016 study, researchers found that people who sang

together in a group reported a higher sense of wellbeing and meaningful connection than people who sang alone.

8. Singing improves wellbeing

Don't just take my word for it! The University of Leeds is so convinced of the impact music can have that they offer an MA in Music and Wellbeing, exploring in more depth the relationship between engaging with music and the positive effects on health and happiness.

9. Singing saves you money

Your voice is a free musical instrument! When I was young and played violin and piano, I thought singers were inferior beings because they couldn't play an instrument. Older and wiser, I now realise that singers are superior beings because they are the instrument.

10. Singing tickles your brain

There's a scientific explanation for the immediate sense of pleasure we feel when we sing. Inside the inner ear lies a tiny organ called the sacculus. The sacculus forms part of the balance-regulating system and is connected to the part of the brain that registers pleasure. The sacculus is stimulated by low-frequency high-intensity sounds - like singing. So, when you sing, you could say the sound is literally tickling your brain.