



<http://health.howstuffworks.com/mental-health/human-nature/happiness/singing-happy.htm>

## Does singing make you happy?

By: Julia Layton



In the United States, choral singing is the most popular of all arts-related participatory activities [source: [CA](#)]. Across the country, 28.5 million people regularly sing in one of 250,000 chorus groups [source: [CA](#)]. It's a group activity that seems to stand the test of time better than others, and there may be a very good reason why: Singing has some effects that other participatory activities don't.

It has become pretty obvious in the last couple of decades that singing has special draws. Regular people all over the globe are addicted to karaoke singing. And many of those people can't even carry a tune. Bars use it to draw customers on slow nights: People will come if they can sing for a crowd. People will watch others sing for a crowd, too -- "reality" competitions like "American Idol" and "X Factor," two of the most popular shows in the United States and around the world, respectively, are all about singing.

Of course, some of the competitors on those shows can actually sing really well. It's clear why people are drawn to them. But what's the draw for somewhat-less-talented singers to belt out a tune? Why the huge interest in karaoke? Why all the singing in the shower, in the car, in the chorus? Does singing make people happy?

In this article, we'll find out what effect singing has on mood, outlook and general psychological health. We'll look specifically at choral singing, which is where the most recent and surprising research has been done. Apparently, choral singing, whether with a church, city or private group, really does make people happy.

The physiological effects of singing are fairly well-documented. For those who doubt its power, just look at songbirds: When male songbirds sing to female songbirds, it activates the pleasure center of the male's brain. In fact, scientists have discovered that the effect of singing on the birds' brains is similar to the effect of addictive drugs on human brains [source: [EurekaAlert](#)]. But there's a caveat. That effect doesn't happen when the birds are singing alone.

As it turns out, singing's effect on humans has a similar caveat.

# Physical Effects of Singing

Singing has some of the same health benefits as exercise.

All types of singing have positive psychological effects. The act of singing releases endorphins, the brain's "feel good" chemicals. Singing in front of a crowd, a la karaoke, naturally builds confidence, which has broad and long-lasting effects on general well-being. But of all types of singing, it's choral singing that seems to have the most dramatic effects on people's lives.

A study published in Australia in 2008 revealed that on average, choral singers rated their satisfaction with life higher than the public -- even when the actual problems faced by those singers were more substantial than those faced by the general public [source: [MacLean](#)]. A 1998 study found that after nursing-home residents took part in a singing program for a month, there were significant decreases in both anxiety and depression levels [source: [ISPS](#)]. Another study surveying more than 600 British choral singers found that singing plays a central role in their psychological health [source: [ISPS](#)].



Image courtesy of [Library of Congress](#)

But why? Could you just start belting out a tune right now in order to make yourself feel happy?

It's possible. Some of the ways in which choral singing makes people happy are physical, and you get them whether you're in a chorus or in a shower -- as long as you're using proper breathing techniques during that shower solo. Singing can have some of the same effects as exercise, like the release of endorphins, which give the singer an overall "lifted" feeling and are associated with stress reduction. It's also an aerobic activity, meaning it gets more oxygen into the blood for better circulation, which tends to promote a good mood. And singing necessitates deep breathing, another anxiety reducer. Deep breathing is a key to meditation and other relaxation techniques, and you can't sing well without it.

Physical effects, while pretty dramatic, are really just the beginning. Singing causes happiness for other reasons that have less of a biological basis.

# Psychological Effects of Singing



Fox Photos/[Getty Images](#)

Two Welsh members of the Men's Choir of the Great Western Railway Institute practice aboard a rail carriage. Singing in choral groups establishes a support system.

Some of the greatest connections between singing and happiness are more mental than physical. They're harder to measure, but just as significant. Choral singers need to concentrate on their music and technique throughout the singing process, and it's hard to worry about things like work or money or family problems when you're actively concentrating on something else. So choral singers tend to have a built-in "stress-free zone." Learning is also part of the process -- learning new songs, new harmonies, new methods of keeping tempo. Learning has long been known to keep brains active and fend

off depression, especially in older people.

The question remains, though -- why choral singing specifically? Concentration and deep breathing can happen in a recording studio, or in the privacy of your own home.

It's because some of the most important ties between singing and happiness are social ones. The support system of being part of a group, and the commitment to that group that gets people out of the house and into the chorus every week -- these are benefits that are specific to group singing. And they seem to be a big component of why choral singers tend to be happier than the rest of us. The feelings of belonging to a group, of being needed by the other members of that group ("We can't do this one without our alto!"), go a long way toward combating the loneliness that often comes along with being human in modern times.

And in that case, you might get nearly as much happiness from joining a bowling league or a Scrabble club as from joining a chorus. Probably fewer endorphins, though.