

**Make a joyful noise:
keep singing in the shower—no matter what the neighbors say. It could reduce your pain
and prolong your life**

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YOUR VOICE is a tool of expression and a vehicle for improving your well-being. Singing is linked to lower heart rate, decreased blood pressure, and reduced stress, says Patricia Preston-Roberts, a board-certified music therapist who practices in New York City. Preston-Roberts uses song to treat patients suffering from a variety of psychological and physiological conditions. "Some people who have been traumatized often want to leave the physical body, and using the voice helps ground them to their bodies," she says. "Singing also seems to block a lot of the neural pathways that pain travels through."

Singing has distinct advantages over everyday chitchat. "When we sing instead of speak, we have intonation, melody line, and crescendo, which gives us a broader vocabulary to express ourselves," says Suzanne Hanser, chair of the music therapy department at Berklee College of Music. "Because singing is visceral (something we do with our bodies), it can't help but effect change."

Can't carry a tune? Other vocal techniques may be effective. An Italian study published in the British Medical Journal has shown that repeating prayers aloud can help you breathe more efficiently. "In addition to the psychological effects of reciting prayer, there are also notable physical effects," says lead author Luciano Bernardi, M.D. Emitting repetitive sounds slows respiratory patterns, resulting in deeper, more regulated breathing. As your breathing rate slows, gas exchange becomes more efficient, helping to increase oxygen levels in the blood.

Sound therapy has been used in the rehabilitation of cardiac patients, but healthy people can benefit as well, Bernardi says. He recommends dedicating at least an hour a day to some form of vocal repetition; the rosary and a yoga mantra were used in the Italian study, but any prayer or simple phrase will be equally effective. "There are no contraindications," he says. "And it is so simple and cheap."

3 ways to sound off

Chanting

In Kirtan, or call-and-response chanting, practitioners repeat sacred Sanskrit names. "We are turning toward that deeper place inside ourselves while relaxing our hearts and releasing pain and

tension," says singer Krishna Das. Chanting doesn't require a specific belief system. "There is no ideology or philosophy you have to play into," he says. Just surrender and follow the leader. To begin, pick up Das' album Greatest Hits of the Karl Yuga and chant along.

Singing

You must sing correctly to receive optimal health benefits, says music therapist Patricia Preston-Roberts. Start by practicing breathing from the lowest point in the abdomen, which will lead to singing that's properly supported by the lower body, not the throat. "Breathing is the beginning of it all," she says. After relaxing the jaw, back of the neck, and shoulders, practice inhaling through an imaginary straw and exhaling while making ssss sounds.

Toning

Vocal music therapy isn't limited to songs with lyrics. Toning uses sustained notes instead of words. More freeform than chanting, toning is usually based on vowel-like sounds, such as eeee, ooh, and aaah. "Toning is sonic massage," says Preston-Roberts. "The body is massaging itself through the vibrations of the tonal music."