

# THE CONVERSATION

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## Flow state, exercise and healthy ageing: 5 unexpected benefits of singing

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Singing with others feels amazing. Group singing promotes social bonding and has been shown to raise oxytocin (the “bonding hormone”) and decrease cortisol (the “stress hormone”).

But it’s not just about singing in groups. There are many unexpected ways singing is good for you, even if you’re on your own.

Singing is a free and accessible activity which can help us live happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

And before you protest you are “tone deaf” and “can’t sing”, research shows most people can sing accurately in tune, so let’s warm up those voices and get singing.

### 1. Singing gets you in the zone

If you’ve ever lost track of time while doing something slightly challenging but enjoyable, you’ve likely experienced the flow state. Some people refer to this feeling as being “in the zone”.



Playing around with a song you know can help you get into a flow state. Shutterstock

According to positive psychology, flow, or deep engagement in a task, is considered one of the key elements of well-being.

Research has shown singing can induce the flow state in expert singers and group singing.

One way to get into this flow state is through improvisation.

Try your hand at some vocal improvisation by picking one phrase in a song you know well and playing around with it. You can improvise by slightly changing the melody, rhythm, even the lyrics.

You may well find yourself lost in your task – if you don't realise this until afterwards, it is a sign you've been in flow.

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***Read more: Let it happen or make it happen? There's more than one way to get in the zone***

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## **2. Singing gets you in touch with your body**

Singers make music with the body. Unlike instrumentalists, singers have no buttons to push, no keys to press and no strings to pluck.

Singing is a deeply embodied activity: it reminds us to get in touch with our whole selves. When you're feeling stuck in your head, try singing your favourite song to reconnect with your body.

Focus on your breathing and the physical sensations you can feel in your throat and chest.

Singing is also a great way to raise your awareness of any physical tensions you may be holding in your body, and there is increasing interest in the intersection between singing and mindfulness.

### 3. Singing as exercise

We often forget singing is a fundamentally physical task which most of us can do reasonably well.

When we sing, we are making music with the larynx, the vocal tract and other articulators (including your tongue, lips, soft and hard palates and teeth) and the respiratory system.



Singing can be great exercise for your respiratory system – and your whole body. Shutterstock

Just as we might jog to improve our cardiovascular fitness, we can exercise the voice to improve our singing. Functional voice training helps singers understand and use their voice according to optimal physical function.

Singing is increasingly being used to help improve respiratory health for a wide range of health conditions, including those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Parkinson's, asthma and cancer.

Because singing provides such a great workout for the respiratory system, it is even being used to help people suffering from long COVID.

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***Read more: Long COVID: For the 1 in 10 patients who become long-haulers, COVID-19 has lasting effects***

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#### 4. Singing builds psychological resources

Group singing can help combat social isolation and create new social connections, help people cope with caring burdens and enhance mental health.


Studies show these psychological benefits flow because group singing promotes new social identities.

When we sing with others we identify with, we build inner resources like belonging, meaning and purpose, social support, efficacy and agency.

#### 5. Singing for “super-ageing”

“Super-agers” are people around retirement age and older whose cognitive abilities (such as memory and attention span) remain youthful.

Research conducted by distinguished psychologist and neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett and her lab suggest the best-known way to become a superager is to work hard at something.

 An older couple sing in the kitchen.

Learning a new skill – like singing – is a great way to help with healthy ageing. Shutterstock

Singing requires the complex coordination of various physical components — and that’s just to make a sound! The artistic dimension of singing includes memorisation and interpretation of lyrics and melodies, understanding and being able to hear the underlying musical harmony, sensing rhythm and much more.

These characteristics of singing make it an ideal candidate as a super-ageing activity.

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***Read more: How to stay fit into your 60s and beyond***

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