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**Dementia Inclusive
Singing Network**

Why sing together?

We know that singing is good for us. This guide will give you some information about how singing together helps our health and well-being, and it includes a short list of publications and websites that you can look at for more information.

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What happens in the body when we sing?

Research tells us that singing is good for our bodies. It exercises the muscles in our upper body, strengthens our lungs, improves our breathing and helps our posture. We breathe deeply when we sing, and this increases the amount of oxygen in our blood which also helps us to concentrate better.

There is also evidence that singing helps our immune system, eases pain, and helps us to sleep. Research suggests that singers tend to have greater connections between different parts of the brain than non-singers. Especially as we get older, the benefits of singing can really help our physical health.

Improving mental health and well-being

Singing - especially singing with other people – can improve your mood and give you a feeling of energy. We know that singing makes our brain release chemicals called endorphins that make people feel positive. Singing can also change levels of some hormones in our bodies and this reduces feelings of anxiety.

Whatever your skill or style of music, singing in a group can help you make new friends and bring you closer to people in a fun and joyful way. It promotes a sense of well-being which can help us all deal with our busy, complicated lives.

More information

A study carried out in London (Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, 2017) showed that 4 out of 5 people said that they had a greater sense of well-being after taking part in an arts activities. If you would like to read more about this research, you can find it at: <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>.

Singing is a social activity

Perhaps the most important thing about singing together is that it helps us to feel that we are part of a community. In 2017, a survey of choirs and singing groups (Voice Now, The Big Choral Census, 2017) showed that 40,000 groups across the UK meet regularly to sing together. That's more than 2 million people!



More information

If you want to read more about the survey of choirs carried out by Voices Now in 2017, you can find it at: <https://voicesnow.org.uk/research/big-choral-census/>.

Many people – including people who are living with dementia - find that singing in a group gives a feeling of belonging. Everyone is able to contribute to the group, and we are all celebrated for our achievements. It can also promote a more inclusive view of people as individuals and not as people defined by an illness.

Singing and dementia

The benefits of singing together includes supporting our physical, emotional and mental health. It also helps with social bonding and is good value for money. The benefits are as true for people living with dementia as anyone else. Arts commissioning, known as social prescribing, is being increasingly introduced alongside medical prescriptions.

In 2018, the International Longevity Centre UK published a report on how music-based activities can change the lives of people living with dementia and their families. Their research states that music based interventions can help facilitate:

- Increased social interaction
- Decrease stress hormones
- Enhance quality of life

More social interaction

Inclusive group singing provides an ideal opportunity for social interaction. Importantly, it can be a place where this takes place naturally without stigma or embarrassment.

People with health and care needs often have support. A singing group or choir can offer a valuable support network to family, friends and carers, and a place to meet and share experiences with others.

The act of singing can improve relationships between people living with dementia and their carers and loved ones. This is because it draws out emotions, stimulates memory, and involves creating new, shared experiences.



Less stress

The focus involved in taking part in group singing means it can ease aggression or agitation. It may also reduce anxieties and stress, or abnormal vocalisations.

Better quality of life

So, why do 40,000 groups meet every week across the UK to sing together? We haven't talked about FUN! Here are some final thoughts from a community choir member on the impact of singing together:

“Whilst choir is foremost a place to learn then sing great music, the experience far exceeds expectations of how enjoyable it can be, and how valuable it becomes.

There are life-lessons here; such as taking risk, focus, being fully present, staying versatile. And smiling and laughing often. Some of this is simply what happens when people come together, but there is also great forethought, preparation and vision for what enables and supports this...

Choir and its community are inseparable, and the sense of being a warm, friendly, dynamic place, infuses everything we do. Fellowship and friendships grow, paths cross all over the city, and we carry it home to other parts of daily life. Our singing community then carries purpose and intention far beyond itself.

Beyond all of this, on a personal level, choir helps attend to a whole crowd of individual needs, alongside the fluctuations in our own lives...The contribution to our wellbeing are great motivators for being in, and sustaining the adventure of choir. We know with certainty, that being at just one rehearsal, or just one term from beginning to end, ignites an appetite for more of what felt good about this, and the wish we'd discovered it sooner.”

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