

Singing your way to better health

www.singforbetterhealth.co.uk

I run six well attended therapeutic **Sing For Better Health groups** per week, across Brighton & Hove. They are for older people – or anybody any age, with a long-term health problem. Many of our members live on their own - the singing groups become a lifeline to them, where they form friendships; one of the main aims is to get older people out of isolation.

What's really important to me is to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support, where nobody feels criticised – that's why we sing "in one voice", without harmonies, just with accompaniment, so that "singing out of tune" is not an issue. We've been running for over ten years, and have over time compiled a song book with songs that our members suggested – show tunes, traditional songs, Vera Lynn, Elvis Presley, Beatles and many more. In our sessions we usually "go around the circle", giving every member the opportunity to choose a song to suit their mood.

We start the group with specific relaxation/ posture/ breathing exercises. Good posture and breathing are so important - much underrated for general health and well-being, as well as mental health.

Our members can choose to stand or sit when singing, but always with a good and relaxed posture – not looking down onto their song books.

The groups are very friendly and supportive, and welcome newcomers. Our tea breaks are important parts of the sessions, when people enjoy socializing – with much talking and laughter.

These are results of the 2013 medical research project into the benefits of singing on health and well-being, conducted by a student at the Medical School of Sussex University, using Sing For Better Health groups.

Breathing and Posture:

- **71,5% increased control in breathing**

"It has helped me a lot in learning how to get over periods of breathlessness and get my breathing back into control"

- **24% increase in exercise tolerance**

"I couldn't go up a short flight of stairs without resting twice and I couldn't go up the street I lived in, [...]. since I've started the singing class, I can do both things."

Speech:

- **14.2% increased vocal projection**

"I've got Parkinson's and it's helped me feel better. I was never depressed but it has lifted my spirits even more and it's helped me project my voice, and it's given me confidence".

Social and Mood:

- **81% created new friendships**

"But what is good is we notice if someone hasn't been well for a long time. We ask where they are and if they are alright. We care; we miss the people that aren't here.

- **19% felt able to join other groups**

"I think a lot of older people. I know I do, just feel as if they're a nuisance and in the way. When I am here I get over that quite easily."

- **71,4% increased their sense of happiness**

"It's made me appreciate life and it's good".

Healthcare professionals and medication use:

- **24% decreased number of GP visits**

"I feel that I've spent less time going back to my doctors with flare-ups of my COPD".

- **9% decreased hospital admissions**

"[...] have been able to stay away from my doctor and the hospital and avoid the use of antibiotics and steroids."

- **19% decreased medication use**

"I haven't had antibiotics for at least a year now".

With thanks to:

R. Wheatley, student at Brighton and Sussex Medical School

Dr.K. Walker-Bone, BSMS

Dr.L. Marshall-Andrews GP, Futurehealth

Dr.S. Andersen, Futurehealth

We were awarded the Sector Star Award, "for use of creativity to bring a particularly broad range of benefits to older people" - and the "Older People's Award" for Contribution to Creative Arts"

Our newest YouTube film:

<https://youtu.be/kGEJqEMre20>

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